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September 18
1918

Volume 18
Number 6

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Poor *Dobie's* troubles, aired in his letters to Piperock, will give you a cheerful laugh.

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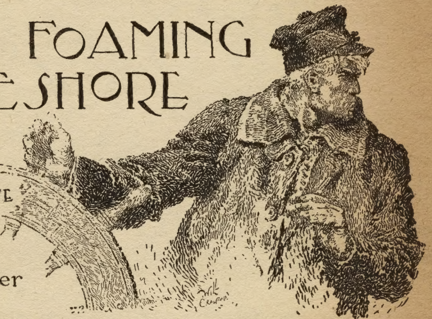
THE FOAMING FORESHORE



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by
Samuel
Alexander
White

Author of "Ambush," "The Trail of the Rabiscaws," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE SCHOONER *GRAYWING*

Now, brothers, for the icebergs of frozen Labrador
Floating spectral in the moonshine, along the low, black shore!
Where in the mist the rock is hiding, and the sharp reef lurks below
And the white squall smites in Summer, and the Autumn tempests blow;
Where through gray and rolling vapor, from evening unto morn,
A thousand boats are hailing, horn answering unto horn.
Whittier's "The Fisherman."

HUGHIE HAY, lookout on the Gloucester schooner *Graywing*, queen of the American fishing fleet that fished the Labrador waters on the heels of the advantageous Reciprocity Treaty of 1854, paused at the foot of the perpendicular ladder that led from the vessel's deck down into her cramped cabin. In the act of unceremoniously breaking in on the scene below, his captain's uplifted finger held him, and he waited thus, staring across the smoke-blurred forecastle triangle, waiting for the forefinger of the brown sea-fist to fall.

It was a huge fist he watched, and the frame behind, lolling on a bunk, fully matched the fist. A full six feet it sprawled, ponderous in its bulky oilskins, the frame of a Viking surmounted by a Viking head.

Waves of fair hair, luxuriant, silky, topped bronzed features, fiercely tender, and from under golden brows bold sea-blue eyes looked out as Norseman's eyes in the ages gone looked out from their shield-hung bulwarks. They were the eyes of pride, the eyes of a conqueror, the eyes of a man who would never be denied, and yet in the face they illumined was more than colossal daring, more than unalterable determination. In it was that philosophic repose of the seaman who in his thirty-five years of voyaging had communed deeply with

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the deep sea and gaged its measureless strength as vastly over and above the measure of his own.

In the nearby bunks that lined the oilskin-decorated walls sat the rest of his crew: "Irish" Kerrigan in his attitude of eternal expectoration, shoulders hunched, hands in pockets, his ruddy Erin-bred face glistening under the light of the lantern hung on a beam and his pipe and his brogue on the tip of his tongue; "Boston Jim," slim, straight and strong as a stanchion, with sallow skin and features gentle, almost esthetic, as if he might have been a New England parson drifted out to sea; Patterson, a lopped-off Titan of a man, placid, somnolent-eyed, five feet tall but two hundred and twenty pounds in weight; Brown, a wizened Gloucester shark with a twang that suggested an A-string somewhere down in his bony chest; "Scotty" McCaig, a braw strutting Highlander whose strut had compromised with the sailor's roll in his columnar legs till he two-stepped his way wherever he went about the schooner *Graywing;* Tom Halifax, a famous sealer with the scars of a dozen trips to the ice floes marring his leathery face; and Bolero, the cook from Cuba, dark-hued, quiet, excellent, like the black cigars of his birthplace with which he hazed his cookery-perfumed galley.

God-fearing men of Gloucester all, native or adopted, up on Newfoundland's French shore for cod, in Baie Verte with their trap, they listened to the prayer of the Reverend Lance, the itinerant missionary of this vast fore shore dropped aboard by night from his Church yacht *Star of the Sea.*

Up-standing straight in his ministerial black by the long table that ran from the sharp angle of the *Graywing's* bows to her stout foremast, his spectacles glittering over short-sighted eyes and his purged face haloed by the yellow light of the oil lantern, he was concluding his short service with a benediction, giving them the peace of God and asking His protection for them while they seined the deep under menace of storm and fog and reef and berg.

Quick with an oath in anger, with a fist-blow in a brawl, they were, nevertheless, each according to his breed, inherently religious, and to Lance's benediction they chorused sonorous "Amen." As into the eyes of God they had looked overlong into the depths of the sea, and the Omnipotence of its creation had bound them with stronger bonds than any landsmen's creed or sect.

Swift to devotion, swifter perhaps to action, the captain's finger of warning dropped for his lookout Hughie Hay, and Hughie, himself a fresh-faced, auburn-haired lump of a Gloucester lad with the glowing cheeks of a woman and the wise gray eyes of a child, went on to announce the news he had carried down the ladder.

"Cap'n Taylor, it's thet freighter ez wuz makin' into Château; thar's trouble aboard—yellin' an' fightin' goin' on," he informed. "She's yawin' about somethin' turrible an' thar's no tellin' what truck's draggin' overside to walk plumb through aour cod trap. I thaought you aought to knaow!"

"Confound it all, Hughie—you're right I ought to know!" cried his Viking captain.

He sprang from his bunk as he spoke and rushed for the ladder, yelling for his men to follow.

"Tumble up, boys!" he exhorted. "Out of the way, Hughie—I'll go first! Oh, yes—Lance, come on if you want to!"

CHAPTER II

THE FREIGHTER *AUK*

TAYLOR was up the ladder and on deck with amazing agility for one of such great frame, and on his heels tumbled Hughie and all the crew with the Reverend Lance hastily ascending in the rear.

From the deck of the *Graywing* the captain looked out across the heaving Strait of Belle Isle, across the green-blue waters streaked with frozen froth, jeweled with pale-emerald floating ice and overlaid with the mother-of-pearl of a rising moon. Southeastward, between him and Belle Isle Island, wrapped ghost-like in Atlantic fog, yawed the freighter Hughie Hay had sighted, not an ocean-going cargo steamer but a sixty-ton schooner carrying Labrador stationers to their Summer fishing-stations.

Too poor to own their own schooners, the stationers were freighted down the coast to their rooms every Spring and herded up again like cattle in the Autumn on vessels belonging to the firm with which they dealt.

"Yonder she is!" the captain pointed out to Reverend Lance. "And a fine little plague-ship for your ministering, Lance!"

"What ship is it?" demanded Lance, peering short-sighted over the shimmering sea.

"The *Auk*, over from Bay of Islands on Newfoundland," Taylor told him. "Belongs to old Peter Laval and doing business from Château to Chidley."

"*H'm. H'm.* Laval, eh? One of my best church supporters," commented Lance.

"Sanctimonious old whelp," corrected Taylor. "Good heavens, his old wagon will ruin my eight-hundred-dollar cod trap! Where's the French fishery cruiser? Where's Admiral Pellier and his *Groix?*"

"Yaonder off'n York Point, Cap'n!" spoke Hughie Hay.

He pointed where, almost invisible behind a jumble of low icebergs deep azure in the shadows, the long black hulk of the Fishery Protection Service cruiser lay at anchor together with the admiral's private yacht *Esperance*, which he used as an auxiliary vessel for shore work 'round the harbors.

"Then why isn't he on his job?" demanded Taylor who had run foul of Pellier several times on his Newfoundland voyages and who had at last been definitely warned off the French Shore. "If I happen to dry a seine taut in the sun he's after me for the size of my mesh, but Laval's blundering *Auk* here can—by the tall Pole Star, look, there's no one at her wheel! We've got to board her!"

Swiftly he sprang to take his own wheel, beckoning the regular wheelsman, Brown, to his side, and at the same time calling orders to his men who, swift as he, ran up the big mainsail and backed over the jib.

"No time for dories, boys," he warned. "Have to jump her rail as we go by. Brown, grab this wheel when I say! And you, Bolero, fall to and handle the sheets for Brown when he comes about on the other tack!"

Under Taylor's guidance the *Graywing* caught her stride, headsails ballooning, fore and main booms crashing across as she leaped toward the yawing *Auk* not three cable-lengths away. The freighter swung drunkenly to starboard. Taylor veered a point or two in his course, and as swiftly, as silently and as smoothly as a knife skirts a pot of grease he skirted her rail and barked to Brown at his elbow.

Brown's hands fell upon the spokes Taylor's hands left, and Taylor with a running jump vaulted the rails of the *Graywing* and *Auk* as a double hurdle. Hughie Hay, Irish Kerrigan, Boston Jim, Patterson, Scotty McCaig and Tom Halifax were over the hurdle with him. With him they landed upon the cluttered deck of the *Auk*, and as they heaved themselves up out of the amazing muddle of things that burdened the freighter they found to their surprise the Reverend Lance in their midst.

"You here too, Lance?" grinned Taylor. "Haven't lost your college legs yet, eh? Well, maybe you'll need your college fists as well. Looks like a free-for-all fight and lots of unsavory facts—but steady, boys o' mine, steady, we have to handle the schooner, you see, before we handle her crew. Lower the heavy canvas—yes, both of them, fore and main."

He himself grasped the freighter's kicking wheel and quickly brought her to under jumbo alone.

Then with a rush he and his men jumped away from the canvas-billowed booms and dived down among the struggling mass that glutted the *Auk* below decks.

CHAPTER III

THE FLOWER OF THE COAST

"A FINE little floating plague-ship, eh, Lance?" was Taylor's war-cry as he went smiting right and left into the packed rabble that would have made a full passenger list for a five-hundred-ton coasting steamer.

Being of only sixty tons, the *Auk* had no space below to boast of, and what space she had was crammed to the last inch, so that Taylor and his crew could get no footing at first but rode upon the hips and backs and shoulders of men in their effort to smash an opening in the jam.

According to the custom of freighters, the *Auk's* hold was first spread with a layer of unbreakable cargo. A second layer of traps, nets and seines overspread this. While upon the bed of twine rested the bunks of the stationers with their gear in bags, boxes and barrels sheering in pyramids to the deck overhead.

Here they herded, eating and sleeping in cramped unsanitary quarters, carrying on a travesty of cooking by turns at the tiny galley or bolting their food raw.

Nothing but make-shift sailcloth partitions screened the women's bunks from the men's. In the mêlée these partitions had been torn away and shrieking women and girls in various stages of dishabille were maelstromed in the swaying horde that trampled their bunks under foot and sent the tiers of boxes and barrels toppling on their heads.

Under the showering ruin they huddled in the dancing light of the smoky lanterns, raising hopeful eyes at the coming of the *Graywing's* crew, and one young girl, crouching for shelter at the foot of the mast, flung out her arms in appeal to Taylor in the lead.

"Ah, *mon Americain—mon Americain!*" she cried.

White as a lily she gleamed in the unwashed horde, her delicate, beautifully-chiseled, oval face terror-bleached till it seemed carved from ivory. Over the tapered curves of her half-bare shoulders where her enfolding cloak lay low on her neck, over her forehead patricianly high, her hair was tossed in a tangle like silken floss, and through the golden net her great eyes flashed out, eyes violet-blue as the tint of Labrador ice in shadow, as the water-heart of a lonely cliff-walled Labrador fiord—such eyes as a man may see but once in a thousand miles of Labrador coast.

"Ah, *mon Americain—vite!*" she appealed in a voice like the silver lapping of the Summer waves. "*Mon Americain—vite!*"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Taylor involuntarily as he struggled toward her. "Who in the name of the mermaids is she?"

"Marie Laval—the flower of the coast, they call her!" spoke the voice of Lance at his shoulder. "You know old Peter. He's her father."

"But—but how is it I've never seen her before?" panted Taylor, knocking men this way and that in his effort to reach her.

"She's been schooling at St. John's. I guess she's through this Summer. I remember now old Peter told me he was going to take her on the stations. Yonder's old Peter behind her—and her mother, old Anne. Both too fond of their smuggled brandy, Taylor, if I do say it with a clerical tongue. Can't you smell it in the air? A perfect reek, and I shouldn't be at all surprised at this bedlam! I know Peter's brandy has been the cause."

"And that's their daughter!" marveled Taylor. "The flower of the coast! Yes—a flower in the slime! Quick, boys o' mine, get the women up on deck!"

Drunkenly clinging to the mast behind Marie, he had full glimpse of her parents in his rush, old Anne, brown-faced, brown-eyed as a gipsy, fat, ungainly, in slovenly galoshes, tubbed-up skirt and greasy head-shawl covering her oiled black hair from which gold ear-rings peeped; old Peter in worn hip boots and oilskins, his yellow toothless face lighted by cold, colorless, icicle-like eyes and, by strange anomaly, shaven bare except for a narrow snow-white fringe of whisker that rimmed it from ear to ear under his drooping southwester.

He glimpsed them, unconsciously noting every characteristic, every detail, but his thought was only of Marie, and, jamming swaying bodies apart with his shoulders and knees, he forced an opening and gathered her pliant body into his arms.

"*Merci, mon Americain—merci, mon* Viking!" she half-laughed, half-sobbed in impetuous gratitude. "I had the fear of death under those stamping heels but, *voilà*, I knew you would come when I called!"

"Ha, my flower of the coast!" breathed Taylor as he fought his way on deck with her. "Could I leave such a flower as you in the slime?"

CHAPTER IV

ADMIRAL PELLIER AND THE *ESPERANCE*

Behind Taylor, breaking into the cool night air upon the chaotic deck, came Lance, guiding the stumbling Peter and Anne up the ladder by the arms, while after Lance, with tugging and shouting, Hughie Hay, Irish Kerrigan, Boston Jim, Patterson, Scotty McCaig and Tom Halifax heaved the women to safety.

As Taylor straightened himself up on the *Auk's* deck he saw through the black snarl of her mainsheets the wings of another schooner all silver in the moonlight.

"Brown," he yelled, taking it at first for the *Graywing*. "Brown—but hold on, it's not my schooner! It's the *Esperance*."

"*Oui*, the *Esperance*, and quite at your service, *Capitaine* Taylor," spoke an even voice from the stern of the *Auk*.

Taylor wheeled and stared through the

amazing litter of boats, oars, buoys and fishers' paraphernalia that covered the vessel from bow to stern. A boat full of men was moored to the rail, and three boarding figures cast long inky shadows across the afterdeck.

Instantly Taylor recognized the figures that cast the shadows: Pellier of the *Groix*, his well-knit body and military shoulders filling his commanding admiral's uniform, his close-clipped brown beard touched silver by the moon and his keen brown eyes, far-focused from their constant sea-ranging, burning out under the peak of his cap; Jacques Beauport, boyish midshipman of the *Groix*, likewise in uniform, dark-eyed, swarthy-skinned, with the stealthy reserve of a heart unfathomable stamped on his Breton face; and "Codroy John," Pellier's skipper of the *Esperance*, a gigantic bearded Newfoundlander dressed in moleskin trousers and canvas jacket, with a rugged, craggy face and deep blue eyes prophetic as the eyes of a seer.

"At your service, *Capitaine* Taylor!" repeated Pellier. "And what is the trouble this time, I would like to know?"

"None of my making but yours for the 'tending," answered Taylor gruffly. "Though I've done half the job for you. There was a drunken fight below and we got the Lavals and all the women out for fear of their being trampled."

"*Dieu*—the Lavals!" exclaimed Pellier, leaning forward and staring at old Peter and Anne in the moonlight.

His eyes switched to the face of the girl Taylor held, and the Gloucester captain saw him start and draw up his shoulders more rigidly.

"Then in that case," Pellier went on rapidly in a voice official in its intonation, "I shall put them ashore in my boat while my men restore order in the *Auk's* hold. Jacques! Codroy John! Tell them I am aboard and let that still their tongues or they will be taken in charge."

Jacques Beauport and Codroy John dived below, and Taylor could hear them yelling above the din, Beauport's shrill staccato cries spacing Codroy John's booming roar.

"Stinking cod-hunters! *Voilà*, will you revel in the cells at St. John's? Listen, makers of a thousand smells—the admiral himself is on your cluttered deck. *Oui*, Admiral Pellier of the *Groix!*"

"Aye," in Codroy's bass, "I'd like to die if he bain't! A stench ye be in the nose o' the Lard, ye fools! A powerful lot o' breakers o' Newfoundland navigation laws, runnin' a vessel wild like this! Back to yer bunks or ye'll lose yer voyage and face the Admiralty Court at St. John's!"

Under the threat and the warning of Pellier's nearness the tumult died down below decks, and Pellier himself waved old Peter and Anne, meek as whipped curs, into the *Esperance's* waiting boat.

"You, too, Marie—quickly!" he begged, anxious to retrieve as far as possible an awkward situation.

Marie hesitated, her violet-blue eyes meeting Taylor's for a moment in the moon-glow before she slipped out of his protecting grip.

"*Au revoir, mon* Viking, I will thank you better when I can," she whispered as she glided after her father and mother.

With an odd feeling that somehow he had been robbed of the fruits of his efforts below, Taylor watched the black boat streaking off to the *Esperance.*

"Marie, Pellier called her," he exclaimed, turning slowly to Lance. "So the admiral knows her as well as the parents—knows her that well?"

Lance nodded confidentially.

"Knows her well," he coincided, "and he would marry her in a moment if she would speak the word. But, there, hers is the heart of a maid with a score of suitors, among whom Jacques Beauport and his commander are chief. The heart of a maid, Taylor, and an impulsive heart at that. You know how they are. She won't pledge herself to the admiral, much less to Beauport, though old Peter and Anne urge and threaten and scheme. Do you think her beautiful, Captain?"

"The most beautiful girl on the fore shore!" admitted Taylor without hesitation. "But is she—is she—well, Lance, I can't bring myself to say it of a girl like her, but you know what some of the women on these cursed freighters are, don't you?"

Again Lance nodded, seriously, regretfully, his face all thoughtful lines in the moonlight.

"That I do," he confessed, "and my protest based on this specific case goes to the Government tonight. But not Marie! I can take an oath under heaven on that. Marie is pure as the heart of an iceberg is pure. A victim of nothing but circumstances, Taylor—that and unsavory parents. Hello—there's another schooner abeam of the *Esperance*. Is it your *Graywing* coming about? My eyes fail me in the dazzle of the moon.

Taylor looked up and gave an affirmative shake of his head.

"The *Graywing*, boys o' mine," he announced to his clustering crew. "Borrow some of the *Auk's* dories for a minute and we'll row back to the schooner."

CHAPTER V

HAULING THE TRAP

IN THE blaze of the rainbow dawn across the glittering façades of the scores of scattered icebergs the *Graywing* hove to by Taylor's trap berth in the strait, and seven of the eight dories dropped overside.

Ever quick to progress, it was the Americans themselves that had introduced seines into the haunts of the cod. In place of the ancient method of taking the fish by hook and line or jigger, Captain Norman of Brigus had brought the cod-trap down on the Labrador. No longer men with the ready money to purchase a trap bothered with the hook and line or jigger or puttered with the trawl.

With the great seines rich harvests were drawn from the icy deep, and Taylor himself on more than one occasion had gathered an even hundred quintals at one haul. Of the customary two hauls a day, this was the lucky morning haul, and with song and shout the *Graywing's* crews in the dories raced expectantly for the moorings of their berth.

Dead ahead of them, shining blood-red upon the sapphire sea, bobbed the four anchored buoys that buoyed the corners of the vast square-topped bag of meshed twine. The bag itself, invisible in the watery depths of the strait, was open at the top, its edges, full fifty feet to the side, supported by long lines of cork floats streaking from buoy to buoy.

From one corner branched a leader, a single wall of net that walled the Belle Isle currents across and inveigled up or down-swimming fish into a funnel-like opening in the trap. Once in, they never found the small end of the funnel again, but swam imprisoned 'round and 'round their huge elastic cell.

Underrunning the agitated edges of the trap, the seven dories sculled in place and, laying aside their oars, the seven rowers seized the floating edges of the pound. Standing up to their work, swaying to the heave of the swell through the strait, timing their pull to a fisherman's chanty, they hauled their trap, lusty giants reaping their finny harvest as fishers of all ages, ever since the day of Peter, have cast forth their nets and harvested the sea.

Heaving thus in the sudden glare of golden sunlight, etched starkly against the round blue hills of the Atlantic beyond, every man stood out, his individuality fixed, like a row of cleanly-sculptured bronze statues poised against the azure sky: the Viking Taylor, the adolescent Hughie Hay, the expectorating Irish Kerrigan, the parson-like Boston Jim, the lopped-off Titan Patterson, the braw McCaig, the battered sealer, Halifax!

To the drone of their chanty they pursed and pursed the trap, rising and falling, heaving and holding, quivering there in a web of striking color, color of indigo ocean, crimson buoy, green-painted dory, sun-gilded oilskins, diamond-dewed net—a blood-pulsing picture all vivid as a startling seascape hung upon dun walls.

Lustily they heaved and lustily they sang.

And in the center of the picture, rimmed 'round by the dripping, scintillating net that sagged with the weight of its catch, boiled a maelstrom of quicksilver, the packed cod, mobile twenty-pounders lashing furiously as they were pocketed tightly in a solid mass.

"By the ribs o' sunken Spanish galleons!" cried Irish Kerrigan at the sight, "Ye've topped wan hundred quintal this toime, Capten!"

"That she is, men—an' a quarter," calculated the lopped-off Titan Patterson. "Ain't it a record for the coast?"

"I believe you, Patty," beamed Boston Jim. "I reckon one hundred and ten was all—"

But the rest of their calculations was lost in Taylor's roar.

"Alongside, Brown!" he bellowed, freeing one bronzed hand and waving it to the wheelsman of the *Graywing* who, with the exception of the Cuban cook, Bolero, was the only man left aboard. "Walk her up in a hurry!"

"Right-o, Cap'n!" twanged Brown in

acknowledgment. "Araound an' araound she goes!"

Holding hard, they could see Bolero dive like a dark snake for the jib to back it over, could mark Brown give and take his spokes with sureness and serenity, and almost before Taylor's waving hand returned to its grip on the net the silver-gray schooner, graceful as a gull, breasted lightly down on the dories.

CHAPTER VI

CHÂTEAU, THE STORIED

"WHAT livers to fry!" gasped Bolero at sight of the prize haul.

He took the brown cigar from his teeth and wiggled it exultingly. Then he and Brown jumped snappily to the rail to handle the dory tackles.

"Sluice them on deck—quick!" urged Taylor. "Sag enough here to unjoint a man's arms!"

Bolero and Brown hooked on and swiftly swung outboard the dip-net rigged on a pulley. Up and down the splattering dip-net plunged. In a silver stream the cod were scooped inboard, all alive and flopping in the pen, and while the dories, leaving Taylor aboard, sheered off again to reset the empty trap, Brown and Bolero hastened to spread the splitting-tables amidships.

"Never mind, boys," Taylor stopped them. "I'm not salting these down. I'm taking them in to Château to be made ashore."

Without a wink of surprise Bolero and Brown desisted, Bolero going off immediately to his tiny galley and Brown taking his accustomed place at the wheel. They made no comment then, but when the dories were nested aboard once more and sail crowded on the *Graywing* the crew had opportunity to pass the word as the schooner headed inshore.

"Aye, an' 'tis made fish ashore, they'll be, ye ken," winked Scotty McCaig to Halifax. "An' for why? Are the cod nae plentiful an' this the first week o' June? October's a lang way aheid, Tammy. Loys o' time tae dry a few hundred quintals ashore an' still fill our hold tae ballast us hame tae Gloucester! Eh, mon—wha' are ye gulletin' doon yer laughs for?"

"Why're you puttin' that squint in them canny eyes of yours, Scotty?" countered Halifax. "Did you hear me gossip a word about dryin' ashore? So a Château firm makes them cod—what? Well, Scotty, I'll jist venture a whisper in your cauliflowered ear. I'll bet you a pound o' Fisherman's Friend I kin name the room they'll go to."

"I take ye! Wha' room, ye seventh son o' a prophet?" challenged McCaig.

"Old Peter Laval's room!" prophesied the battered sealer.

Wing and wing, the speed of a water-witch in her rakish beautiful lines, Taylor himself in Brown's place at the wheel, the *Graywing* drove on for Château Bay, the grandest fiord on Labrador's southern fore shore. Past York Point, its western entrance, she tacked, raising the sheer basaltic cliff of the Devil's Dining Table capping Henley Island and fluttered on through the cove-like harbor of Château itself.

Rimmed 'round by towering Laurentian hills covered with birch, balsam and spruce, snuggling at the foot of Beacon Hill the hoary thousand-foot sentinel of all, spread the ancient, storied settlement. Here, Taylor knew, Jacques Cartier in 1534 had first set down his wandering foot on the shores of his *La Nouvelle France*.

Here was the founding of his first settlement of French *colons* that grew by the hundreds, to be swelled in the middle of the seventeenth century by bold Breton emigrants, to be further augmented a full century later by exiled Acadians who in 1843 located at Matashquan and inevitably drifted in to Château till it hived in its present glory of swarming population and hummed with the ceaseless industry of the fishing.

The industry of the fishers was the blood and fiber of the place. Newfoundland merchants marketed the catch, and of the several firms doing business there Peter Laval secured the bulk of the trade. Of all the old-time dealers, slave-masters of the outports and rogues and hypocrites at heart, Taylor acknowledged old Peter the peer.

No more skilful hand than old Peter's to cull a fisherman's voyage and grade it for his profit as damp or Madeira!

No swifter pencil than old Peter's to charge the planters double prices for supplies and carry on his books without interest their balance at the settling up!

No, nor no greater pride than Peter's when sober, nor no deeper devotion as, a pillar of the church, he sat in the front pew and prayed for his delinquent livyeres in the seats behind him.

And, lastly, no more sordid coiner of men's and women's lives into Terranovan dollars as evidenced in his custon of working women as cheaper labor than men upon his Labrador stations.

CHAPTER VII

OLD PETER'S ROOM

LAVAL'S establishment lay in the curve of the cove below the village graveyard sleeping under the slant of Beacon Hill. It consisted of a long wooden jetty, a barnlike supply store generally known as the barter-house, miserable, tumble-down fish-sheds and a disgraceful room, sod-thatched and rough-boarded on unbarked studs.

Up and down the jetty stalked old Peter, his keen, colorless, icicle-like eyes overseeing everything that went on and at the same time watching the crowded shipping of the harbor.

"What have you there, *Capitaine* Taylor?" he cried as the *Graywing* swung to anchor off his wharf. "A trap haul for me, perhaps?"

"Aye, Peter, a record haul of one hundred and twenty-five quintals for a trap of that size, all alive and kicking, yours at the current figure," proffered Taylor. "And no damp or Madeira about them—no, nor any Miquelon brandy either!"

Peter grinned a deep grin that wrinkled his sanctimonious face.

"*Voilà*, I was drunk last night, but I am sober and penitent today," he declared piously. "*Oui*, and the *Auk* is many souls lighter and gone on her way to Camp Islands. It would have been a pity to drag a hole through a bag like that. My room is ready, *Capitaine*, and I'll send the carteel boat out for your fish. No, you can't moor alongside till I get the harbor-end of my jetty in place. *Comment?* You know how much there was to do."

Peter stumped down the wharf to give his orders, and immediately the carteel boat, a long fish-barge used to freight the catches from the fishing-grounds to the rooms, put out in charge of homespun-jacketed livyeres. The morning haul of the *Graywing* was dumped in and conveyed across the harbor, Taylor himself riding his own dory, trailed by the carteel boat with the livyeres and the *Graywing's* men aboard, in to old Peter's stage.

As he approached the straddling skeleton of the stage which was built of longers he scanned it for the first glimpse of the roomies Laval was working. Surely, Taylor thought, with all his riches, hard-fisted though he was, old Peter would hardly work his own womenkind in a room like this. Surely he would not—by Jove, yes, he would, too! Yonder was the slim swaying of a figure he had seen before!

Three laden dories ahead of the carteel boat were pewing the last of their loads to the stage, and there in the stagehead position stood Marie passing the gleaming cod along a chute to the cutthroat old Anne. Her double-bladed knife flashing in the sunlight, old Anne in two strokes nicked each fish on either side of the neck, with a third slash ripped each belly open and slung the mangled carcass along to the header.

The header was a quarter-breed Eskimo woman, leathered, wrinkled, impressive as a Buddha, who pulled heads off and entrails out, separated the livers with wonderful dexterity, dropped each liver into the liver puncheon and slid the disemboweled fish on for the final operation of splitting.

The splitter, a full-blooded Montagnais squaw with one hand mittened, boned the cod with three lightning slashes and slapped them into a large vat whence her fourteen-year-old boy wheeled them in a dredge barrow away to the fish-sheds to lie a month under salt in layers three deep before being dried.

IT WAS an efficient crew of roomies old Peter worked. From stage to salt bulk there was no pause in the glittering stream of cod—not till the carteel boat with the trailing dory swung up to the wharf and Marie raised her eyes to look fairly into Taylor's.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she gasped.

Taylor shuddered inwardly at sight of her slim loveliness in the ugly mess, but he carried himself boldly in the awkward moment.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Marie," he greeted, seeming not to see the smatter and slime, "I have brought your father a trap haul to handle for me."

"*Bon matin, Capitaine* Taylor," she returned, swiftly recovering herself. "You must be a mighty fisher."

But her involuntary halt in her work had balked the rapid machine. The pitchforked fish piled up on her, the cutthroat old Anne and the rest waved idle knives in the air, and old Peter let out a roar like a bull.

"Name of a name, Marie!" he bellowed. "Do not stand there like a rock pillar with a dozen quintal of fish at your feet. *Diable*, move them along!"

Marie flushed scarlet, her face like some rare, delicate crimson flower among the silver gleam of the cod, and Taylor saw the fire leap to her eyes as she shot a wicked side-glance at her father. Taylor himself had only one thought—to get her out of that mess, but he was too shrewd to try to bully old Peter or to appeal to his better nature. Laval was not a man to be bullied or influenced by appeals. To move him one had to speak in terms of his pocketbook.

"But look, Peter," he argued, "your Marie is too slight for such rush work. I have a big trap haul here and very likely another coming by evening. Let me put one of my own men in her place. Let me put Hughie Hay here, as good a stagehead as ever kept the dories forking. It is in my own interest and with Hughie on the stage it will be better for you as well."

"But the pay," demurred old Peter. "Marie gets nothing, for *voilà*, it is the return she gives me for her St. John's schooling."

"Hughie gets his wage and share as one of the *Graywing's* crew whether afloat or ashore," Taylor hastened to assure him. "He will cost you nothing."

"*Très bien*, then, let him take Marie's place," accepted old Peter with alacrity.

Hughie sprang out and took the girl's position as stagehead, while Marie turned to Taylor, a wonderful light of gratitude in her eyes. He had extricated her quickly and neatly from her demeaning bondage without touching her pride, and she was not loath to let him see that she admired his delicacy.

"Ah, *mon* Viking of the *Auk*, how can I thank you?" she breathed gratefully, yet with something of coquettishness.

"Why, by taking Hughie's place aboard the *Graywing*," laughed Taylor.

With a touch of gallantry he handed her down into his dory under old Peter's icicle-like but unprotesting eyes.

"The schooner has nothing to do till the trap haul this evening, so till then I'll just take you for a holiday cruise 'round Château Bay!"

CHAPTER VIII

UNLAWFUL MESH

AND what a cruise and what a holiday it was! And what a respite for Marie—the clean deck of the trim *Graywing* under her feet in place of the slimy stage, the savory sea breeze in her nostrils in lieu of the reek of disemboweled cod, the laughing voice of this great Viking of a sea captain in her ears instead of the snarling admonitions of her parental slave-masters, old Peter and old Anne!

Care-free, buoyant, joyful-mooded as the sparkling sea itself, they poked the schooner's bowsprit into all the inner harbors of Château Bay, into Henley, into Antelope Tickle, into Pitt's Arm; they climbed the Devil's Dining Table to glimpse the sail-dotted panorama of the strait; and finally brought up at evening in crimson-cliffed Red Bay twenty miles to the westward.

Truly, a day of comradeship, of confidences exchanged, of romance exotically blossoming forth upon a romantic shore, a shore steeped in lore and legend and storied in love and feud. Here in the beginning the Eskimos and Montagnais wooed and warred, to be followed in peace and conflict by the English and French and, later the northward-voyaging Americans, and blood of these ancient coastwise adventurers ran in the veins of both Taylor and Marie.

Yonder ruin of Fort Pitt, in Pitt's Arm, almost obliterated by the willow shrubbery—well, Taylor's father was one of the officers of the American privateer *Minerva* which besieged it in 1778. That old tumble-down fortress, Fort Greville, to the northward of Henley Island over there—*voilà*, few knew anything about it, but Marie could tell. Her granduncle on her mother's side, old Greville the planter, had built it to keep the warlike Eskimos away from his Breton *colons*.

Such bonds and grounds of intimacy they discovered by the score throughout the day. The day had been a blazing jewel, topaz-clear and diamond-bright, but at evening a sulfur-colored mist came in from the Atlantic and the wind began to rise.

"A dirty squall comin', Cap'n," prophesied Tom Halifax.

"You're right, Tom," agreed Taylor, "and we'd better haul our trap and get in to the shelter of Château before it blows any worse."

Accordingly, the slim Boston Jim as lookout, the battered sealer Halifax relieving Brown at the wheel, they bore away through the yellowish mist for their trap-berth near York Point.

"Sight the buoys, Boston?" demanded Taylor as the schooner, fleet as the wind itself, flitted ghostlike from fog bank to fog bank.

"Aye, Captain, I reckon I have their range this minute," Boston Jim sang out. "Aye, in an open patch I have them. But there's a schooner lyin' off it! Aye, and a dory underrunnin' the floats! Luks like somebody helpin' themselves to our fish."

While he sang out Boston Jim lost sight of the trap berth, but plunging through a fog bank half a mile wide, the *Graywing* soared once more into a clear water space not two cable-lengths from the trap. Riding the clear space, her topsails wreathed in the scud that blew high overhead like smoke, Taylor recognized the *Esperance*, Admiral Pellier's auxiliary vessel, with her skipper Codroy John in charge. In the lowered dory that was underrunning his floats he saw Jacques Beauport and Admiral Pellier himself, not hauling as Boston Jim had suspected but evidently inspecting the mesh of the net.

With a growl in his throat Taylor barked tart orders to his men, and, folding her wings like a gull alight, his schooner lay to alongside the *Esperance*.

"What in blazes does this mean, Pellier?" he roared at the dory in a mighty wrath. "Who gave you authority to touch that net?"

"The law, *Capitaine* Taylor," Pellier sent back. "Jacques Beauport brought word to the *Groix* in the harbor that you were using two-and-one-half-inch mesh, and I came out to seize your trap."

"Then Jacques Beauport is a cursed liar and you are a plagued fool to believe any tale he brings!" Taylor raged. "I hauled that trap just this morning. The mesh was the lawful three-inch then, and it hasn't shrunk since!"

TAYLOR wheeled in his fury to grasp the boat tackles and slam a dory overside.

"I'll put Pellier and Beauport back on the deck where they belong in one blazing minute," he promised Marie.

"But let me go, too," she begged, and dropped into the dory with him as the boat rose upon the swell. "I'm going too. There was a net seized in Château Harbor this morning, Antoine Lefevre's, so my father said—*oui*, and a two-and-one-half-inch mesh, if you please! Could it be substitution, *Capitaine*? That Jacques is a dark one when he has a grudge. Maybe he has taken up your own, set Lefevre's to catch you and brought the admiral to see."

"By heavens, if he has I'll brain him!" vowed Taylor.

With a surge he drove the dory along the line of floats toward the other craft, rowing so viciously that Beauport held up a warning hand.

"It's no use making such a pretty fuss, *Capitaine*," he warned. "We have the size of your mesh. *Oui*, ask Codroy John, there, whom any man well knows does not lie. Two and one-half, is it not, Codroy John?"

"Aye, it be two and one-half," boomed Codroy John from the deck of the *Esperance*. "I'd like to die if it do measure a twine-breadth more."

Taylor seized the floats and hauled in a few feet of the net.

"It's not my trap," he vehemently declared. "It's not the trap I hauled in this spot this morning. My own has been lifted and this one dropped in its place."

"*Mon Dieu*, a fine fairy-story," chortled Pellier. "Buoyed by your buoys but not your net, eh? Ho! Ho! That is a new plea for law-breakers."

"No, it's not my net," gritted Taylor. "My buoys, but not my trap!"

"Then whose is it, pray?" scoffed Pellier.

"Antoine Lefevre's, most likely," flashed Marie. "And *Capitaine* Taylor's is most likely stored away where it will not be found. Ask Jacques Beauport, there. He was the man who seized it this morning and—and used it again!"

Pellier's eyes turned inquiringly on Jacques.

"Ciel!" exploded Jacques, the fire flaming in his eyes. "Do you and your Yankee *Capitaine* insinuate that I—that I——"

"Yes," cut in Taylor, "you exchanged them either on your own or some one else's bidding."

Beauport choked, his swarthy face reddish-purple in his rage.

"Canaille—canaille! Fils du diable!" he anathematized. *"Nomme de——"*

Taylor's swinging oar stopped short his epithets. Pellier and Jacques had just time to duck low before the swishing spruce blade scarred their dory gunwale. And before they could raise their heads anew or seize a weapon, Taylor, bringing his bludgeon 'round in its arc again, stove their whole bow with a terrific blow.

Pellier and Beauport floundered in the water, yelling for help from the *Esperance*, and Taylor looked up to find the schooner footing forward under sail. At the first sign of altercation Codroy John had slipped her in between the schooner *Graywing* and the two dories at the trap. Taylor and Marie were cut off from their vessel, and it seemed for a moment that the *Esperance's* crew might seize him in the name of the law along with his trap.

But his own crew on the *Graywing* were likewise watchful. They moved when Codroy John moved, cracking on full sail in the howling squall so that the schooner leaped across the foamy wave-crests, outpointed the *Esperance* and drew a length clear.

Then swinging on her heel, the *Graywing* came about on the other tack, threatening to shave the *Esperance's* bows as she crossed the auxiliary vessel's course.

Tom Halifax was yelling Codroy John warning to alter his course, but Codroy refused to shift a point. His aim was to blanket the dory, seize its two occupants, pick up the pair of floundering men and drive on before the *Graywing* could give Taylor any aid.

"All right, then, I'll bump your old wagon!" bellowed Tom.

He cut fairly across the *Esperance's* bows. There was the high-pitched whine of taut, chafing sheets, the sullen grind of timbers, a medley of cries and a volley of oaths in French, and the next moment the *Graywing's* bowsprit crashed out the *Esperance's* foremast in a trailing jumble of wreckage.

The big foresail, sagging overside, held her like a sea-anchor, while the *Graywing* swept clear and apparently unharmed, luffed up in the gale of wind.

Taylor, heaving his dory alongside with his one undamaged oar, rose on the crest of a wave. Kerrigan and Patterson, waiting tackles in hand, hooked on and brought him, Marie, dory and all on deck with a run.

"We've lost our trap, and we'll lose our schooner too, if we don't get to shelter!" Taylor shouted the moment he struck the deck. "Crack on all you've got and run into Château!"

EVEN as he spoke Tom Halifax's cry rose above the howl of the wind.

"'Ware the mainmast! Yon rough work must 'a' cracked her! Look out, she's foulin' the fore boom!"

Taylor wheeled to see the main boom poised weirdly in air, with the mainmast sagging on to the foremast and adding its windage in a terrific strain.

"Axes, boys o' mine!" he yelled. "Jump lively there!"

But as the swinging blades of half a dozen of the crew hit into the tangle, the added windage told. The foremast gave suddenly with an explosive snap, and both masts and both booms with their ballooning sails crashed over the starboard rail.

The *Graywing* heeled till the rail went under. It seemed for a second that she would never rise out of the trough of the seas, but Taylor, with a warning word to Marie to hold tight, rushed away from her with an ax snatched from the hand of one of his men. He sprang upon the slanting stump of the foremast, at the same time yelling orders in the tumult of the breaking seas.

"Cut her clear, boys o' mine!" he clarioned, his bright blade cleaving in a circle of light about his head.

It was wild work in a wall of spray for a moment, and Marie caught her breath, her eyes on Taylor like a true Viking in storm or boarding clinging to the stump of the foremast, his fair head steel-haloed by his ax, hurling the wreckage adrift while the wind rose, bringing with it the menace of floe-ice hurtling down. The *Esperance*, in as bad a plight as they, threatened every moment to drift down on them. Her crew had hauled Pellier and Beauport aboard and were cutting their own wreckage free when the *Graywing* slowly righted and Marie drew her breath again.

"*Mon Dieu*, that was dángerous," she gasped.

"All over now!" cried Taylor.

Laughing like the Viking he was, he sprang back to her side as the foremast stump assumed a vertical position again and slid him back on to the deck.

"Rig a couple of trysails on those stumps," he ordered, a wary eye on the *Esperance* all clear and hard abeam.

Like magic the emergency sails fluttered on and drew, the stumps of fore and main like two dwarfed jury masts, and craftily, swept continually by the baffled sea, the *Graywing* crept from the menace of wave and wind and floe into the quiet of Château harbor. Hard in her wake the *Esperance* snailed in under similar rig, and for an instant the two vessels rode rail to rail before rounding to their anchorage off Peter Laval's long jetty.

"Well, Pellier," shouted Taylor, "this is what comes of Beauport's trickery. A nice mess it's made of two fine schooners! You'd better look to the whereabouts of your men after this!"

Pellier, staring at Taylor with his far-focused brown eyes as the Gloucester captain lowered a dory and prepared to row Marie ashore answered not a word, but when the dory touched old Peter's wharf the admiral beckoned Jacques Beauport to him and closeted himself with him in the *Esperance's* cabin.

CHAPTER IX

THE TOAST

THE dark was down on shore as Taylor's dory touched old Peter's wharf, the soaring crests of the wooded hills lost in the black murk of a stormy sky, the cheery lights of Château pricking like golden stars through the scudding fog. About Peter's room burned evil-smelling kerosene flares, one on the stagehead, one at the cutthroat's stall and one at the splitter's table. In the faint glow of the farther flare worked the Montagnais squaw splitting the last of the day's catch, her fourteen-year-old boy coming and going beside her as he had done since dawn, his dredge barrow bumping and squeaking dolefully in the night.

At the splitter's table old Anne was cleaning her knives on a wad of tow, whetting them keen and sticking them in the slabs, ready for the morrow. While on the stagehead, the final fish shot away, Hughie Hay leaned on his fork beside old Peter and stared in a vain attempt to make out the strange rigs of the schooners that had just cast anchor.

"*Mon Dieu*, it is you two, then," cried old Peter as Taylor and Marie climbed out on the stage. "What have you done to your *Graywing*, *Capitaine*? We couldn't see well for the fog, but I know it is not the rig you sailed out under this morning."

"No, I had a brush with Pellier's *Esperance* and we both lost some sticks," laughed Taylor.

"*Diable!* You tell me so? Come into the lean-to and let us hear about it."

With a word to Hughie Hay to take charge of the dory and wait for him, Taylor followed old Peter and Marie over the wooden jetty. The slipperiness of the cod was underfoot, the reek of the cod in their nostrils, and involuntarily Marie shuddered. This was what she had left for a golden day. This was what she had come back to. The thought of taking fork in hand at dawn once more and standing there on the stagehead nauseated her and a wild desire to flee the whole thing filled her impulsive being.

The lean-to backed the fish-sheds, and through a doorway all sagged askew they entered Peter's Château home. Of a truth it was but a Summer home, occupied during the fishing-season and deserted while he spent the Winter at Bay of Islands on the Newfoundland shore, but nevertheless its starkness and squalidity struck Taylor like the blow of a dirty hand.

A tin lantern hung from the low roof casting a feeble light as if ashamed to glaringly illuminate the rude habitation and display its shortcomings to visitors. Through holes in the roof the fog was dripping, hitting the hot top of the lantern with a sputter or streaking down the unrinded timbers that held together the aperture-filled walls. Underfoot a slab floor bowed and sprung to the tread, a bare floor, knotted, uneven, yawning with two-inch cracks, littered with its own bark that the foot skinned off at every step.

As rough as the floor were the fixings that stood upon it, a rusty, battered stove, a spruce table adzed out in a solid slab with trenailed legs and three stools to match. A three-foot cut of a log, up-ended, served as a washstand, supporting a granite basin and a pot of soft yellowish soap under an endless towel revolving on a roller.

At the farther end Taylor espied the sleeping-quarters, walled off from the main room by unplaned boards. These were simply built-in bunks, and Taylor noted with a thrill of pleasure the cleanly appearance of Marie's, its opening hung with new curtains, her sea-chest within set out for a dresser, her bed well-ordered.

Old Peter's was primitive enough, having neither curtains nor covering, his mattress a layer of moss, but Taylor knew that the hard-fisted old roomer was abroad night and day, never removing his clothes and sleeping with sea boots and oilskins on. From old Anne's he turned his eyes away, for he espied a comforter that had not been washed since her youth and deeper than that he did not care to pry.

Yet old Peter might have been a sovereign in a palace so merrily he laughed at Taylor's account of Beauport's trickery. The predicament of the sly Jacques filled the hardy old mariner with delight.

"*Ciel!*" he chortled. "That Jacques Beauport! He is the wily rascal. No fool, Jacques, when it comes to anything he wants. But he is caught this time. But wait—you will see. Admiral Pellier is a man of honor and fairness. *Oui*, and a man of discipline. He will draw the truth from Jacques as a man corkscrews a bottle of brandy. *Voilà*, and that makes me remember I am dry! Will you have something before you go, *Capitaine*?"

Old Peter stepped over to his bunk and from a secret receptacle under the moss produced a bottle of brandy.

"Fresh from Miquelon?" inquired Taylor with a laugh.

"*Non*, St. Pierre!" chortled old Peter. "It is one of a case and there are many cases—buried, you understand, where the customs officer will never grub. *Votre* health, *Capitaine! Oui*, and a full voyage even if your trap is gone and your schooner dismasted!"

"Your own health, Peter; aye, and a full voyage!" returned Taylor, his eyes meeting Marie's. "Here's hoping!"

CHAPTER X

THE RETURN OF THE *ESPERANCE*

WHAT passed between Pellier and Beauport in the cabin of the *Esperance* the fishers of Château never knew for a certainty, but they shrewdly surmised. For in the fair weather of the next day the auxiliary vessel in charge of Codroy John crossed the strait under a single stick for repairs at Humbermouth. Furthermore, Jacques Beauport and six men of the *Groix* went with her, and at that Château tongues commenced wagging. It was plain enough!

Voilà, they all knew Marie Laval had another suitor, one at last whom she did not flout! Jacques Beauport, the observant, the cunning, had tried to get rid of him at a stroke, but Jacques had gone too far with his trickery and the admiral had taken a hand. How honorable, that man Pellier! The desire of his heart likely to be snatched away, and yet he had not countenanced the opportunity to take unfair advantage of his rival!

Oui, Jacques Beauport and the six who had helped him change *Capitaine* Taylor's net in secret were going across to be disciplined at the Fishery Protection Service headquarters at Humbermouth, over on the Humber arm of Bay of Islands, Newfoundland.

Indeed, it seemed that the Château tongues were right, for Taylor heard no more about the charge of using unlawful mesh in strait waters. His seine was not returned, in all probability because Beauport had destroyed it, but he himself was not molested. As for Marie, she did not go back to her stagehead position on old Peter's wharf. Taylor saw to that.

Every day in the gray of the dawn Hughie Hay took up her work at the room while she spent her glorious freedom on the Château hills or afloat on Château Bay. The *Graywing* being under repairs in the harbor itself, Taylor had commissioned a trap skiff belonging to Laval and with his handy craft he tended a fresh trap, likewise bought in old Peter's barter-house, moored in his former trap-berth. His luck ran riotously. The cod had struck in in immense numbers.

Every day for three weeks and more was a big fish day. On old Peter's wharf the knives flashed early and the kerosene flares burned late while his vats bulged with waterhorse and his acres of drying flakes covered the bawn (beach). Every week, and often twice a week, he shipped his made fish on a foreigner to over-ocean ports or chartered huge top-masted schooners from Newfoundland's East Coast to freight it to Twillingate or Fogo.

And well he might! For the most famous cod-grounds on the Labrador were here on its southern fore shore, on the banks and shoals of Belle Isle Strait! Slimed with their food, the Château shoals drew the teeming millions, and men of many nations fished while the harvest held. From all the Atlantic ports of the Union American schooners flocked; from all the Newfoundland outports all manner of sailing craft came, stationers, floaters, trawlers, gallant topmast schooners and ponderous brigantines.

Yet amid a horde of mighty fishers Taylor maintained his reputation as the greatest of them all. No man hauled more quintals at a single haul than he, and no man sent such catches slithering along old Peter's chutes. Between hauls he and his crew worked on the *Graywing*. Like Cortereal of old he cut tall masts from the hills, and when everything was in readiness all Château turned out to restep the schooner and dance on her deck and old Peter's wharf in her honor as they christened her brand-new canvas with strong waters of the North.

A gay day that and a gay night with one thousand craft in the Bay, and ten thousand men and women on the beach. And king and queen of the ten thousand were *Capitaine* Taylor and Marie Laval, Taylor hoisting his flag to the foretop and Marie, beautiful as a siren, spraying the new canvas with a bottle of port and humming a little sea song as she sprayed.

AS MARIE finished her song she flung the empty bottle overside and pointed toward the outer reach of the harbor.

"*Mon Dieu*—the *Esperance*!" she cried. "As if the song called her—and what mountainous freight has she got?"

Taylor turned to stare at Pellier's auxiliary vessel boasting a new foremast and loaded with all the shining lumber and gear of a modern room. Codroy John was in charge and nowhere among her crew were to be seen Jacques Beauport and the six men who had sailed to Humbermouth with him. Château tongues were right indeed. Jacques was undergoing his discipline.

Yet Taylor's wondering mind did not dwell upon Jacques. He stared at the magnificence of the cargo the *Esperance* carried, the finest timbers, the most luxurious fixings he had ever seen destined for a room on the coast.

"Is it your father's stuff, Marie?" he asked. And as old Peter at that moment rolled none too steadily down the wharf to meet the schooner, Taylor hailed him with the query: "How now, Peter—have you opened your heart at last? Yonder are the makings of a palace aboard the *Esperance*, and it must have cost you a good many francs!"

"*Diable*, never a franc!" leered old Peter, regarding him and Marie with maliciously triumphant eyes. "It was paid for by Admiral Pellier."

"What?" demanded Taylor. "Is Pellier forsaking the bridge for the planter's flakes?"

"*Non!*"

Laval shook his sou'westered head and wiggled his chin in mirthful grimace so that his fringe of white whisker wavered back and forth.

"It is to replace my own old tumble-down sheds. People have laughed and turned up their offended noses at my room. Well, wait till the old boards rattle down and yonder gear goes up instead, and we will see who cackles with laughter and casts the merry eye. *Mon Dieu*," laughing in drunken raucousness, "does it surprise you, then? Should a son-in-law not be so lavish with his wealth? *Voilà*, Pellier has spoken to Anne and myself in the way of the French for the hand of our daughter. The answer? *Ciel*, see there the marriage gift!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BARTER-HOUSE

"LISTEN for the end of the dance, Lance," reminded Taylor as, half an hour later, he slipped over the rail of the *Star of the Sea* into his dory. "And watch for the two boats and don't lose a second. The thing must be done in a flash before Marie is missed. It's a good job I stowed my made fish aboard as they came from old Peter's flakes. The *Graywing* is ready for the sea except for some light tackle that I'm going up to the barter-house to get."

"Better be careful," cautioned Lance in farewell. "It's a drunken gang Peter has ashore. I'll do my part, all right. Don't worry about that."

Taylor pulled in to the wharf and zigzagging through the wild dance that was petering out to an end, went on up to Laval's barter-house. As he stepped into the lantern-lighted building that was crammed with all manner of sea gear he beheld old Peter himself and four of his cronies chuckling over their half-emptied glasses.

"*Bon matin, Capitaine*—seeing that nearly all the night is spent," gurgled old Peter. "Come and pledge my daughter's health."

"Another time, Peter, when the liquor doesn't run so strong," evaded Taylor. "I just dropped in for that light tackle you put aside for me. The *Graywing* goes to my trap-berth for this morning's haul."

"Here it is, then," mumbled Laval. "Give me a hand, *camarades!*"

The five reached into a canvas-cluttered corner of the barter-house. Their hands flashed forth again, not with Taylor's tackle but with several yards of seine that settled on his shoulders. Caught unawares, like a lion in a net, he hurled himself across the floor with the five clinging desperately to the meshes that enveloped him.

"*Diable!*" snarled old Peter. "You would plan to elope with Marie—*comment?* You would steal off in separate dories and let Lance speak the words over your heads from the rail of the *Star of the Sea* and then dart south in the *Graywing*? *Ciel*, I am not so drunk as you think, *Capitaine*. *Non*, but sober enough to lurk in the shadow of the *Graywing's* sails and overhear you and Marie. The end of the dance the moment, too! *Tres bien*, then, there it is, the last scrape of the fiddles!"

As he struggled Taylor heard the wail of the violins die away, thumping feet leave the wharf and singing dancers pass along the beach.

"The end," taunted old Peter, almost face to face with him through the maze of meshes yet with the protection of that maze between. "Marie is stealing off in a dory. *Oui*, and I'll tell you something. The second dory is not lacking. It too is stealing off, and Admiral Pellier is in it.

"Ho! Ho! Do you understand? It is aboard the *Esperance* and not aboard the *Graywing* she will go. Pellier has a chaplain of his own, Blangard of the *Groix*, remember! A touch of wine and Marie will never know the difference of clergy nor of bridegrooms. Over their heads aboard the *Esperance*, I say, Blangard will speak the words, Blangard instead of Lance, and thus it will save a lot of trouble with the stubbornness of Marie!"

Peter finished with a diabolical chuckle at his own and Pellier's cleverness—Pellier the man of honor and fairness who fell before a mighty temptation when it came to the stake of Marie.

Taylor felt a pang like the thrust of ice in his heart. Then a red-hot surge of anger flooded over him.

"You devil, Peter!" he roared, wrenching to get his arms free from the binding seine. "You cold-blooded, shoal-born, shoal-slimed cod! First you barter her, and then you try to marry her by a trick. By——"

With the colossal heaving, with the strength of a demon he rocked from wall to wall of the barter-house, crashing its trappings this way and that, dragging the five backward and forward with the tremendous Viking power that was in him. Two of them he pinned against the wall with his bulk and jerked off their feet in a sudden lurch so that their side of his twine prison was left for a second unweighted. In that second he writhed his right arm free and smashed old Peter full in the chest. Peter staggered the width of the room and fell backward upon a bundle of sailcloth, and before he could clamber up Taylor struck again and again and Peter's two cronies sprawled on top of him.

* * *

WHIPPING the seine into their faces with a final swing Taylor darted out of the barter-house doorway before the other pair could stop him. A riot raged in his heart as he ran down the wharf, straining his eyes out toward the *Star of the Sea* riding at anchorage amid the harbor craft. Though the night-shadow of the Château hills lay dark upon the water, the approaching dawn was lightening it a little, and he could discern the church yacht and his own *Graywing* astern of her.

There were no dories 'round the *Star of the Sea*—he must be in time! A wave of exultation swept him. A joyous cry burst from his lips—to change the next moment to a curse! 'Round the *Star of the Sea's* hull, the hull that had hidden them, broke two dories, the one spinning adrift with nobody in it, the other rocking to the struggling of two swaying figures.

Pellier. Marie. He recognized them even in the half-darkness, even before Marie's pitiful cry came across the harbor to him.

"Help, help!" she screamed. "It is Pellier. He is taking——"

The rest was cut short, but Taylor had heard enough. With a leap he was afloat, sending his dory surging out.

"Lance, did you see?" he shrilled as he boiled by the *Star of the Sea*. "Pellier got her before she made your yacht. Peter trapped me in the barter-house, but I broke away."

"But where," yelled Lance, peering after his dory through the dark with his short-sighted eyes, "where in the name of Heaven is he taking her?"

"The *Esperance!*" Taylor snarled back. "He'll ply her with wine and the *Groix's* chaplain will marry them."

At Taylor's information Lance threw up his hands in holy horror, a fantom of supplication in the gloom, but Taylor himself was past the *Star of the Sea* and away, driving his dory like a madman to overtake the struggling pair ahead, when like a moth out of the dusk the *Esperance*, her deck-load discharged and trimmed for speed, winged in between.

Taylor heard the metallic clash of tackles. Under full sail the schooner heaved the dory and the two figures in on the run and drove on out of Château harbor. Like a moth she went, and like the black bat that flits in the wake of the moth the warship *Groix* slipped after.

"Convoyed, *Capitaine*," half-cackled, half-croaked the voice of old Peter from his wharf, "*oui*, convoyed to a place where your *Graywing* dare not poke. The honeymoon's at Humbermouth!"

His red wrath gone with the flicker of the *Esperance's* sails, suddenly left white and trembling, Taylor turned his eyes shoreward to see old Peter dimly outlined on his stages by one of his kerosene flares, one hand to his croaking chest that was still heaving in asthmatic jerks from the effect of the Gloucester captain's blow.

White and trembling, his red wrath gone but with the spirit passion that glows like the white heat of fused metal, he shook his fist at the planter.

"You've taken her, you and Pellier!" he answered. "You've stolen her from me, Peter, but as sure as the sea winds blow and the tides turn I'll come again to Chateau to take her back!"

CHAPTER XII

FULL VOYAGE

AND Taylor came, not that season for the Autumn gales completely closed the fore shore to sailing craft, nor the next for Marie sent him private word to Gloucester of the motherhood that was forced upon her like the marriage, but the following Spring! On the heels of Winter he came winging through the strait, threading the maze of icebergs grounded on the shoals just off Château and drove into the harbor itself.

His vow had gone ringing from man to man along the foaming seaboard. The whole coast was agog for his coming. Day by day Marie had kept vigil from Beacon Hill, and day by day the admiral, old Peter and the disciplined Jacques Beauport had taken council against the lifting of the *Graywing's* sails. Jacques had been put on patrol duty with the *Esperance*, and Jacques it was who sighted Taylor's schooner off York Point and brought the news with a rush to Pellier and old Peter on the latter's new wharf.

"*Voilà*, the *Graywing*, sir!" he reported dramatically, drawing himself up proudly on the planed boards.

"The devil," growled Pellier, wheeling from his talk with old Peter. "Where now?"

Beauport pointed where the schooner, hard in the *Esperance's* wake, was pushing through the ice barrier. So close the barrier bulked that it ringed 'round the harbor like a wall. Three days it had lain thus, shutting in the French warship *Groix*, another French gunboat and two British cruisers on the fisheries patrol. Big hulks could not negotiate the narrow passage where deftly handled schooners slipped through, nor did the sullen berg show any sign of shifting.

Close-hauled, with her booms well inboard to miss the chasm-like walls of the bergs, the *Graywing* burst the barrier, the sunset flaming on her sails and on the fair head of the Viking Taylor at the wheel. Handling the sheets those on the wharf saw the well-known forms of his sturdy crew: the adolescent Hughie Hay, the expectorating Irish Kerrigan, the parson-like Boston Jim, the lopped-off Titan Patterson, the braw McCaig, the battered sealer Halifax, the wizened Brown.

Instantly at sight of the schooner the Château beach took up the news, fisher calling to fisher and bark hailing nearby bark.

"*Mon Dieu*, it is the *Graywing* of Gloucester come back!"

"*Oui*, I told one hundred of you that *Capitaine* Taylor would keep his oath!"

"Name of a name, then Admiral Pellier had better to look to himself or he will be left alone. What will the proud man do?"

Pellier heard the medley of comments, and his face flushed.

"Do?" he grated to Laval and Beauport. "I will show these fools! Peter, they must not meet—Taylor and Marie. I must seize his schooner before he can work any deviltry!"

"That will not be hard," ventured the fathomless Beauport.

"Name a charge, then, Jacques," flashed old Peter. "You were always quick of wit in these things."

"Why," prompted Jacques, "there is the matter of his voyage here two years ago. It is against the law for an American to load fish not caught and cured by people of the United States, and he loaded with fish you cured yourself, Peter!"

"Ho! Ho!" exclaimed old Peter, grinning hugely. "You hear, Pellier? Jacques has a long memory. You can trump up no better excuse than that. Seize his *Graywing* at once and hand it over to the British cruisers to take to St. John's. The Labrador is their shore, and theirs is the administering of its law. *Ciel*, the Admiralty Court is sometimes slow. *Comprenez-vous*? The *Graywing* may rot in the harbor of St. John's before its case is heard, and while it is rotting it can not carry anybody off from Chateau."

"*Dieu*," growled Pellier with a whip-like cracking of his fingers, "it goes against my grain, but I will do it. It is either that or——"

AND he finished his sentence with a reckless shake of his head as he put off to the *Groix*. Immediately the *Groix* got under way, and as Taylor boldly rounded to his old anchorage off Laval's new room, the warship crossed his bows and dropped a boat full of men alongside.

"Your schooner is seized, *Capitaine* Taylor," Pellier greeted him coolly from his place in the sternsheets.

"For what?" roared Taylor, his wrath abruptly blazing like the sun-set fires.

"For a breach of the Newfoundland navigation laws," announced the Admiral vaguely. "I shall be compelled to hand the *Graywing* over to these British cruisers to be taken to St. John's. You and your crew will be set down by the *Esperance* at the nearest American port. Get into the boat and go aboard her!"

Pellier stepped on the *Graywing's* afterdeck, old Peter Laval, Jacques Beauport, Codroy John and a dozen more at his heels, forming two guarding lines through which the admiral beckoned captain and crew.

"Come quickly," he ordered, waving a hand to the *Groix's* guns frowning at point-blank range. "There is no chance for resistance."

"You cowards!" stormed Taylor, clenching his fists in their faces. "You scheming whelps! Do you think you're going to drag me off my own deck like a dog? By heavens, I'll sink to the harbor bottom first, *Graywing* and all!"

Defiant he crouched, his men ready set behind him, itching to hurl themselves at Pellier's men, when Codroy John's whisper snarled in his ear. Codroy stood at the foot of one of the guarding lines, nearest to Taylor, and over his massive shoulder he spat the words through his beard.

"In the name o' the Lard, go aboard, Captain!" he urged. "The *Esperance* be as swift a schooner as your *Graywing* and she do lie nearer to the stages. Will you take a look?"

Taylor darted a furtive glance shoreward, and his blood leaped. On old Peter's stagehead stood Marie, with old Anne by her side holding by the hand her toddling granddaughter. Fearful lest Pellier should see the burning in his eyes, the violet flash in Marie's, he turned his head and searched Codroy John's face. Instantly he read its friendliness, and he took up the Terra Novan's cue.

"I don't know, boys o' mine," he spoke, turning to his men with a show of indecision but passing them a warning wink; "when it comes down to the fine thing, I don't know. I don't care for myself or the schooner, but you fellows have kin back home. I forgot that. It isn't fair to you. Maybe we'd better go aboard the *Esperance* and fight our case with the law instead of with our fists."

"Now, that is something sensible, *Capitaine*," cut in Pellier, growing very uneasy at the prospect of stubborn resistance. "It is under the law I am acting, and you have the very same privilege."

"All right, then," surrendered Taylor, "just a minute to get the *Graywing's* log and I'll be with you. I'll promise not to dig up any weapons in the cabin, but send a man with me for formality—Codroy John, if you like!"

He was off to his cabin as he spoke, Codroy John at his heels, anticipating the admiral's nod of assent for fear he should depute some one else.

"Well, Codroy," demanded Taylor, facing the Terra Novan in the closed cabin, "are you with her or with them? With her, I take it! And the *Esperance* is swift, is she, and near the stages? But what about the crew aboard her?"

"They be Newfoundlanders like myself," boomed Codroy John. "Aye, and like myself they be with her. Godfather I were to her, Captain Taylor, and I do love her like the real father she never have had or maybe like the—the—the real husband she never have had. The admiral and old Peter and Beauport do plan wonderful well, but they do forget we Newfoundlanders be God-fearing men. They have gone beyond the law o' God and man, and I will never forgive them for tricking her till I do see her back in your arms. The *Esperance* be ready, Captain. Marie be on the wharf. Will you take the chance?"

"Will I?" exploded Taylor, grabbing his log. "Watch me, Codroy! Come on, before Pellier has a change of mind."

The *Graywing's* log under his arm, he led the way into the admiral's waiting boat and the rest of his men filed after. Pellier, Peter, Beauport and the men of the *Groix* took their places and the rowers sent the craft foaming alongside the *Esperance*. Taylor noted that the auxiliary vessel was not at anchor, but laying to under foresail and jib, and on her deck he glimpsed her crew, six rugged Newfoundlanders whom Codroy John had vouched for.

On to the *Esperance's* deck Pellier herded them, stepping aft himself to give final orders to his men before going back to the *Groix*. The grinning Peter stepped with him and Beauport, both anxious to see the last of Taylor, but their last sight was hardly what they bargained for.

"Overboard with them all!" Taylor yelled before Pellier could give his orders. "Overboard with them, boys o' mine!"

With a roar of exultation his crew rushed the men of the *Groix*, Codroy John and his Newfoundlanders flocking to their aid, stamping up and down the *Esperance's* deck, smiting and wrestling at her rail, Irish Kerrigan, Boston Jim, Patterson, Brown, Hughie Hay, McCaig, Tom Halifax and Bolero the cook, smothering Pellier's force in the unexpectedness of their attack and hurling them into the harbor water.

Taylor himself was locked with the admiral, old Peter and Jacques, fighting the three as an ordinary person would fight a single foe. Vainly they lunged and struck at him. Viking that he was he laughed under their blows, herding them to the *Esperance's* rail and knocking Beauport sheer over it with a lightning blow. Old Peter rushed but toppled back from Taylor's straight-arm punch, caught his legs against the rail and followed Beauport, while Pellier was plucked from the deck in the Gloucester man's arms and cast overside.

"My turn now, Pellier!" Taylor shouted as he splashed. "My turn, Jacques! My turn, Peter, you foxy old devil!"

HE JUMPED for the *Esperance's* wheel as he cried. His crew of the *Graywing* and Codroy's of the *Esperance* were at the main-sheet hoisting the big mainsail, and as he put over the spokes he felt the clean-lined schooner answer like his own. Half a cable's length away old Peter's long wooden jetty ran out into the water, Marie, old Anne and the child on its edge. As the *Esperance* momentarily luffed up Marie suddenly leaped the three-foot gap to the schooner's rail.

Across the slant of the afterdeck she slid, panting with excitement, and Taylor, his right hand on the wheel, caught her to him with his left, holding her thus for a second even as he held the schooner to the jetty.

"Marie, Marie, my flower of the coast!" he breathed, his Viking blood pounding to the thrill, to the danger, to the touch of her clinging hands on his free arm and the whipping of her hair against his cheek. "But your child—the little Madeline?"

"My mother keeps her till things blow clear and we are free, and then she will bring her to me. She has turned to me at the last, my mother, just as Codroy turned."

"Good!" exulted Taylor.

"But the barrier," cried Marie, "the ice-barrier! I pray to God we may pass!"

She trembled against him, her violet eyes were ablaze with the fire of a woman awakened to the crisis of her life. Out beyond yonder ring of icebergs lay the open sea, a free path down to Gloucester, a year of fretting under Pellier's enforced marriage yoke, then release and happiness under the law. It was all that stood between her and another life and through the gap in the ice wall Pellier and his watch-dog cruisers could not go.

Dieu, it was a stake! *Dieu*, how she prayed and clung as Taylor steered for the barrier under full sail! Château Harbor was in a tumult, a thousand clamors rising in the early dark that dropped suddenly as the sun failed. The beach was a-roar with fishers' shoutings, a-rumble with the thud of their feet as they ran to the stage heads to keep the *Esperance* in sight.

Like a witch the schooner sailed. Through the creeping dark and the swirl of mist that came with the dark, her sails gleamed white, pointing for the ice-barrier. Dead ahead, the *Groix's* boats were picking up Pellier and his men and the second French gunboat along with the two British cruisers were moving from their moorings to come to the *Groix's* assistance. But many crafts were in their way, schooners and brigantines at anchor, and before the war-ships could close the cordon the *Esperance* broke through in zigzag tacking and plunged for the gap amid the bergs.

Though the harbor surface was dark, the glittering pinnacles of the bergs still caught the rays of the sunken sun and glowed blood-red like the spires of massed cathedrals in the dusk. On the ruby peaks perched the resting sea-birds, puffins, guillemots, gulls, razor-billed auks, all black as ebony against the crimson afterglow, their sleepy mutterings drowned by the roar of the waves and the rumble of the air in the ice caverns beneath them.

Like the crash of cannon rose the rumble of the air as the *Esperance* approached the passage. Like the roar of surf on a reef broke the thunder of the swells across the emerald ice ledges. But above these both, another sound ripped through the air—the belching guns of the cruisers.

"By heavens, is the madman firing at us?" gasped Taylor.

"No, over us," cried Marie, watching the red flares of the racing gunboats. "Over us—to close the passage. Don't you see? *Mon Dieu*, don't take time to close-haul or——"

The rest of her words were lost in the bursting of shells on the ice pinnacles ahead, in the wailing of startled seabirds and the crash of tons of berg tips into the gap.

Marie was right. There was no time to close-haul the schooner.

"Hold hard!" warned Taylor. "Every man hold!"

Wing and wing he drove her at the cleft, her foresail to starboard, mainsail to port, the ends of her booms rasping great furrows in the ice wall that was crumbling under the shelling. Ice fragments were raining all about, and Taylor half-stooped at the wheel over the crouching Marie, shielding her with his body against the falling lumps.

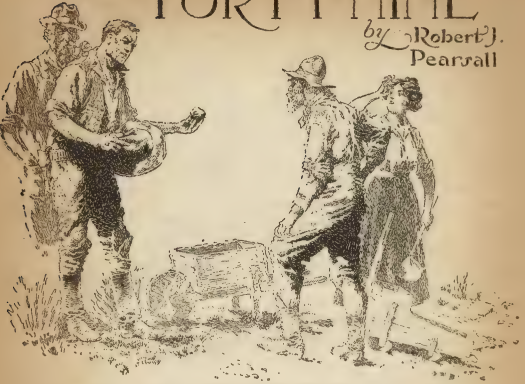
A moment the *Esperance* wedged. Then the vast drawing power of her canvas together with the lift of the surge through the gap carried her on. Her chafed booms stood out again, and, the passage closed behind her by falling pinnacles against all craft large or small, the schooner was gone in the dark of the open sea, driving wing and wing for Gloucester.

So deep was the gloom through which they bored that the sails and the very masts themselves were lost in the murk above. Even the sluiced decks seemed to dissolve underfoot, taking the blurry forms of the rest of the crew with them.

Taylor and Marie, isolated at the wheel, seamen to skim a strange sea all their own, even as their hearts skimmed a strange new life all their own, driving southward Viking-prowed down the foaming foreshore of their love!

FORTY-NINE

by Robert J. Pearsall



Author of "Danger Trail," "Square," etc.

Urge of blood and drive of race,
  Golden lure and wander call—
Strong men all, they clipped the pace,
  To where the rivers westward fall,
'Cross jungle strip and desert bare;
And lo! They found an empire there.
R. J P.

I

"HEY, there, ye will-o'-the-wisp! Haggerty!"

It was good to hear that voice again. John Haggerty, knapsacked, blanket-rolled, and grayish red with the dust of forty miles, turned in time to see the big Irishman that owned it coming through the door of the Eldorado in a rush.

"Sheehy, you old reprobate," and for a moment there was nothing but handshaking.

"Didn't expect to see ye till mornin'," said Sheehy, then. "My stars, you're an annihilator of distance, lad."

"Hardly that," laughed Haggerty. But indeed, he was as lean and hard as though trained for a marathon. His youthful face showed not the slightest sign of fatigue, and he had entered the camp called "Grizzly" free-jointed and easily.

Sheehy's voice grew more sober as he looked his friend over.

"But ye've changed some, lad," he said, "since the crossin' of the Isthmus."

"If I have, it's all I've done," said Haggerty, a little ruefully.

"Except wandering all over like a soul accursed," amended Sheehy. "Ye'll do no good for yourself that way. Ye'd better stop in Grizzly awhile and let whatever you're lookin' for come to ye."

"It's a likely enough looking place for things to happen," replied Haggerty.

"Say," grinned Sheehy, "the only certain thing about Grizzly is its uncertainty. 'Tis as full of explosive unexpectedness as the belt ye pack. But come up to my shanty where ye'll sleep the night, and after ye've deposited your baggage ye may have another look."

As the two started up the dusty street together, Haggerty continued to study the town curiously.

He thought he saw something unique

about it, although in its material aspects it was like any other mushroom mining-camp, hastily tumbled-up and helter-skelter, vigorous, disreputable, and altogether masculine. Log huts, canvas-sided shacks and "shake" shanties were strewn haphazardly along one side of the wide trail. Plumped down here and there were larger structures, from which came the blare of hurdy-gurdies. And among the men that thronged in and out of these places there was the usual Saturday evening joviality and pioneer camaraderie, but there seemed something else, too. Watchfulness, clannishness, suspicion, he would have defined it; but he said nothing, and followed Sheehy to his shack.

When they came out an hour later it was quite dark. The street had grown quieter, but loud talk and cascades of roaring laughter broke from the Eldorado, and wild-looking silhouettes showed through its canvas walls.

Haggerty and Sheehy drifted from this to several kindred places, and wound up in the Golden Bear. All the time, Haggerty played his usual part of total abstainer. He studied the crowd closely, pursuing the search that had become a fixed mental habit with him; and while he looked he renewed his impression of the unusual.

After a while he was able to analyze it. There was an unfamiliar element in the crowd. Mingling with the boisterous miners, the pale-faced, passionless-eyed gamblers, and the inevitable rag-tag collection of loafers and hangers-on, were numerous others that seemed to have no place in a mining-town. For one thing, their hands were uncalloused and their heels spurred; but more significant still was their peculiar air of blended secrecy and challenge, and the aloofness and even hostility with which the regular miners treated them.

Obviously unearned though it was, these men seemed to have plenty of gold. In the Golden Bear they were so numerous that Haggerty put his growing suspicion into a question.

"What is this place," he asked Sheehy, "a mining-camp, or something else? I didn't think," he added significantly, "there was as much gold coin this side of the divide."

The bar at which they stood was lined with noisy men, and behind them well-patronized gambling-tables, wheels and layouts filled the place to the door. Sheehy looked swiftly over the crowded room, and then drew Haggerty to an unoccupied corner near the end of the bar.

"I've been waitin' for ye to ask me that," he said, in a cautious tone. "Ye heard of some outlawry on the way up, maybe?"

"A lot of it," replied Haggerty.

And, indeed, a flood of crime had recently spread all over the up-country. Mysterious disappearances were common; the bodies of men were found floating in streams, their gold removed; express riders were held up and shot; and a general era of deviltry seemed to have set in.

"Well," said Sheehy, "'tis the general opinion that most of the trouble's born right here. This riff-raff ye see—about a month ago they began to drift in on us. About that time, too, 'Black' Doak comes and buys this place, and 'tis here they make their headquarters. Ye can see the cutthroat faces of 'em, and they've no visible means of support save the revolvers in their belts, and there ye are. But there's more and more of 'em all the time, and any night ye can hear 'em boastin' in their cups of what they would do to Grizzly if we run 'em out. They wouldn't go far, they say, havin' a hidin'-place near that no man could find nor a regiment take."

"This Black Doak, who's he?" asked Haggerty.

"Well, if ye ask me, he's the leader of 'em," said Sheehy. "If ye ask him, he's proprietor of this place and a respectable business man. If ye ask the average miner, ye'll get but an earful of luridity, for he's the man that gets their gold to Sacramento for 'em, and charges a third for the service. There was a pony express before his, chargin' but ten per cent., but ye may guess what happened to the riders. Speakin' in general, he's Grizzly's man on horseback, and a comin' millionaire, or a comin' ornament to the end of a rope. And if ye will look comin' through the door—that's him."

Haggerty looked. What his eyes saw was a very large man with a dark, hard face, glittering black eyes, and the general look of the human wolf. What his mind registered was the end of a year-old chase, and the promise of a rehabilitated life.

He stepped sharply forward, his eyes flaming. And then as suddenly he stopped, turned to Sheehy and asked in an anxious, eager whisper——

"That's Doak, you say?"

"Yes. What's up, lad?"

Haggerty's face expressed a torrent of swift thoughts. Doak, the master of Grizzly! His quarry, caught at last and still beyond reach! A desperate riddle flashed through Haggerty's mind—a riddle that must quickly be solved. He put part of it in words to the astonished Sheehy:

"Don't look at him. Now if any one wanted—wanted anything out of him, there'd be no way to get it in Grizzly, would there?"

"Short of killin' him," said Sheehy, "there wouldn't."

"Tell me quick, is there anything that would make it hard for him to leave this place?"

"He's gettin' rich here," said Sheehy, "and then there's a girl. A good girl, too. He seems to have lost his head there. But the girl——"

"All right. That's all."

HAGGERTY straightened around just as Doak saw him.

In his turn, Doak blinked with surprise. He faltered in his pace, and for an instant every feature of him expressed a sharp and unmitigated terror. Then he, too, seemed to have a second thought, and it was with somewhat of a gloating smile that he altered his course and marched straight toward Haggerty.

But Haggerty, curiously enough, looked at him casually and then away again as though he had never seen him before; and when Doak stopped in front of Haggerty he was met with a look of blank inquiry.

"Well, so it's you," said Doak. It was half a sneer and half a threat.

"What's that?" asked Haggerty, in apparent surprise.

"Oh, don't bluff. I know you—Haggerty."

"That's my name," said Haggerty, wonderingly.

"They usually change it," said Doak, nastily, "but, that bein' the case, maybe it's smarter not to."

"It's a common name," replied Haggerty, with rising anger. "I tell you again, you've made a mistake."

"Oh, you can't put that over," rasped Doak. "And I'll tell you what. I ain't no blasted peacher, and it's too cursed much trouble to turn you up, but this camp ain't big enough for you and me. I won't admire seein' you around here after tonight."

"I hope you go blind, then," said Haggerty, evenly.

"Look out for yourself, then, you——"

In the middle of his sentence, Doak's hand had flashed to his revolver butt. But the weapon was never withdrawn. Sheehy didn't see whence he had snatched it, nor, it is likely did Doak; but in Haggerty's hand had suddenly appeared a short, ugly derringer. Its muzzle, filed smooth where the front sight had been, was shoved against Doak's chest.

"That'll be all tonight," said Haggerty, crisply. "Now, about face!"

Doak hesitated an instant, glaring at Haggerty furiously.

"I'm squeezing the trigger," warned Haggerty tensely.

Involuntarily, it seemed, Doak glanced down at the menacing hand and saw the whitening knuckles. In a sort of hurry, he wheeled toward the bar.

So swiftly and quietly had the incident passed that not more than three men observed it, and they made no remark. Doak passed behind the bar. Haggerty turned to Sheehy and found the latter regarding him in utter bewilderment.

"Saints in heaven," cried Sheehy, "where did ye get that gun?"

"Sleeve draw," explained Haggerty, pocketing the weapon. "It's good for snakes. Let's get out of this."

Outside, they turned toward Sheehy's cabin. Sheehy, according to his non-inquisitive code, waited for Haggerty to speak.

"You saw what happened," began Haggerty, after a moment. "I've got to get that man. I've got to get him alive, not dead. And from what you say, I'll have to smash his gang to do it. So I'm going to be a mighty unsafe friend——"

"Another remark of that kind," interrupted Sheehy, "and ye'll be no friend at all. What d'ye think I am? As I explained before, I'm needin' a partner mighty bad. Will ye come?"

Haggerty hesitated.

"The claim next mine," said Sheehy carelessly, "is worked by the girl I told ye about, the one Doak's courtin'."

"By a girl," exclaimed Haggerty.

"Sure, and her father."

A quick, hard light leaped into Haggerty's eyes.

"I will, Sheehy," said he, "and thank you kindly for the chance."

II

SO MONDAY morning Haggerty joined the workers in the gold-bearing gulch that lay back of Grizzly; and he was peering into the riffles of Sheehy's cradle for signs of their first joint clean-up when he heard a woman's voice behind him. He turned, and saw a girl helping a feeble old man down an ill-defined trail to the gold diggings.

They had evidently come from a teetery-looking tent pitched beside an ancient prairie schooner half-way up the side of the gulch. They reached the claim adjoining Sheehy's and immediately fell to work. The girl picked up a shovel, and swung lightly down into the miniature shaft. Intermittent showers of black earth began to come out of it. The old man loaded it into a crudely constructed wheelbarrow.

When the barrow was full the girl climbed out of the hole and wheeled it down to the tumbling creek. The old man began plying the bucket while she alternately shoveled the earth into the cradle and rocked it; always, Haggerty saw, she did the lion's share of the work.

"That's Rosa Brookes?" asked Haggerty, in a queer voice.

"Sure," said Sheehy. "There's none other like her in Grizzly."

Haggerty stared at her. Somehow he had fitted his imagination of the girl to her surroundings. He had pictured an Amazon of a woman, strong, rough, semi-masculine. This girl was strong, but there the parallel ended. She was daintily feminine from the top of her broad felt hat to the worn soles of her shoes. Her face was dark and irregularly beautiful; she was like a flower, transplanted from a hot-house somewhere and shrinking a little.

It wasn't like Haggerty, that imagery, yet it was apt. For, though the girl worked busily, smiled at her father, hummed little tunes to herself, he could see that down deep she was filled with uneasiness. An uneasiness that Haggerty could well understand, when he recalled what Sheehy had told him. Quite apart from Doak's pursuit of her, her late history had been enough to weaken the courage of the bravest.

She and her father had been members of one of the most ill-fated of the transcontinental parties. It had lost itself in the Humboldt Sink, it had taken a wrong cut-off, it had finally been compelled to Winter in the high Sierras. More than half its number had died there, including Rosa's two brothers. An honorable testimony it is to those nineteenth-century Argonauts that most of the women, in all those famine-beleagured expeditions, survived.

Those who got through at last had made straight for the lowlands as though driven by an obsession. But Old Man Brookes had broken down in Grizzly, and Rosa had stayed with him perforce. Now they wanted only to get back to the East, with enough money to buy back the home they had sold to make the trip.

"I'd sure hate to see 'em start," Sheehy had said, "as long as Doak holds the road."

Haggerty studied the girl. Clear as the sunlight was the impression he got of fineness and strength and unsullied honesty. And all of a sudden he wanted very much to win her friendship for reasons quite apart from his desire to trouble Doak. He wanted more than the nodding acquaintance Sheehy and the other miners had, and all morning he puzzled over the problem of attaining it.

That afternoon, chance favored him. Sheehy and he were deep-tunneling at the time, up-stream in the direction of the Brookes claim. Haggerty uncovered a nugget, a pitted and scored chunk of almost pure gold, dull-colored and heavy. They exulted over their find, until Haggerty suggested they might have tunneled too far. Exact measurements proved he was right. By his statement of where he had found it, the nugget belonged to the Brookeses.

So he explained the matter and gave it to them. It was a small thing in a way, but it was the beginning of trust, and that is never a small thing. Haggerty felt somewhat sheepish under the appreciative light of Rosa Brookes' eyes, and under the old man's thanks, and even when he accepted what he had played for, an invitation to call sometime at their tent. But he wouldn't have undone what he had done.

That night Haggerty turned over to Sheehy a hundred dollars in dust. It was half the approximate value of the nugget.

"I'm afraid I lied a bit," said Haggerty. "It really came out of our dirt. I tunneled a little further after I found it, that's all."

Sheehy didn't look as astonished as he

might. He chuckled a little, and then fell into a thoughtful silence.

"I wonder if you're playin' quite fair, lad," he hazarded at length.

Haggerty stared at him.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said Sheehy slowly, "I'll tell ye. Doak knows the girl thinks nothin' of him, for he's forced himself on her through fear; but after the manner of his kind he's in love with her. Ye've seen a flame lick up the side of a house, devourin' while it caresses—well, that's the way of his love. Also he hates ye. Also the two of ye have an account to be settled betwixt ye. Consider them things, and the undisciplined bundle of evil passions that ye know Doak to be, and then ask yourself if you're the safest friend in the world for the girl to have."

But Haggerty had already considered them, and to a different conclusion than Sheehy's. He was very young, and he had the confidence of youth, and youth's ability to believe what he wanted to. If Rosa Brookes were in danger, then so much more did she need him as a friend.

Also, as Sheehy may have suspected, he had another motive.

He underestimated Doak, both his strength and his weakness, else he would not have reasoned as he did: if Doak were made jealous, well and good, the more tightly would he be held in Grizzly, and the more time would Haggerty have to work out the destruction of Doak's power in Grizzly, the seizure of Doak, and his own vindication.

Haggerty's mind went a long trail backward that night, and at the end of that trail there lay a dead man and a cell with a broken lock.

III

"I'VE DONE what you asked me to," said Rosa Brookes. "I don't see him any more. But I'm—I'm afraid. I try not to be, it seems silly. But he's—drinking lately. And I'm afraid of him."

"You musn't be," worried Haggerty. "It'll be all right. In a week more——"

It was Sunday, and they were sitting on a little knoll covered with swaying wild oats, quite out of sight or hearing of the camp.

"There's so much I don't understand," puzzled the girl. "About you and—him. They say the first night you came here you had trouble with him. And you've been working against him ever since, trying to organize the miners against him. Of course, that's good, if he's what you say. But—" and she hesitated, "but he's been saying terrible things about you, too. To me, and everybody."

"What did he say?" asked Haggerty, his voice hardening.

"He said," replied Rosa in a low tone and with an effort, "that if I knew everything about you, I'd never look at you again. That you are worse than even he is. And he said in a few days more he'd be able to prove it, and he would."

For a minute Haggerty stared out over the flower-strewn hills, an uneasy look on his face. Then he turned to Rosa and asked softly—

"Supposing he did—supposing he seemed able to prove it, would you believe him?"

"Oh, I don't know," doubted Rosa. She sat twisting her hands perplexedly. "Everything out here is so different. The men are different. Even you. You did shoot a man. Yesterday. I heard about it."

The thing had been torturing her all day.

"He tried to shoot me" said Haggerty briefly. "I could have killed him. I didn't."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," said Rosa tensely.

"It was the way I knew you'd feel about it that saved him," said Haggerty. "He was worse than a rattler."

Indeed, the man had drawn on him without word or warning. Haggerty's lightning quickness only had saved him. The would-be assassin, who was one of the Golden Bear's most sinister habitués, had evidently relied on Doak's power to shield him from the result of his crime. It was the second attempt on Haggerty's life in two weeks. The other time he had been shot at from behind in the dark, and the bullet had gone through his hat.

Haggerty turned the talk to other topics, delighting to see Rosa's eyes and face light up after a while, as she forgot herself and Doak and Grizzly, and fell under the influence of the perfect day and the wind-swept hills. They found much to talk about, those two; but most of the way back they walked in that close silence that sometimes falls between those that draw nearer than friendship.

After they had parted, however, Haggerty's mind reverted to Doak's threat.

He had thought that if Doak were to denounce him, he would have done it when Haggerty first appeared in Grizzly. The fact that he hadn't seemed to prove his fear, and the correctness of Haggerty's surmise. His threat at this late day meant something. Haggerty wondered what whimsy of fate might have put in Doak's hands the seeming proof he had mentioned. And he wondered whether Doak, in sheer desperation born of jealousy and hatred and fear, would find the courage to use it.

But in the morning Haggerty put aside his doubts and got busy again.

His work was double those days. He was both miner and missionary. In the eyes of those of Grizzly's citizens who profited by the presence of Doak's men, he was a despicable malcontent. To most of the miners he had been from the first a man of mysterious motives, who was dooming himself to death in a worthy but hopeless cause. The second man he preached his gospel of law-and-order to warned him:

"There was one man started to buck Doak already. We buried him quiet. The verdict was extreme shortness of breath, brought on by lead-poisonin'."

But Haggerty managed to live. He lived and talked and made friends, and for a while that was about all.

He heard peculiar arguments. Where there was no law there could be no crime, anyway. Every man his own policeman, that was good enough. Grizzly was only a temporary camping-place; why should they trouble themselves? They hadn't time to bother, their corns hadn't been trampled on much, let the rest of the country take care of itself.

But gradually he began to get the decent element of the camp together. He began to rouse in them resentment at the dominance of the outlaws. He urged that sooner or later the clash would come, as it had come in other camps and in the larger cities. And backing him in all this was the instinct for order and self-government that shows itself wherever Anglo-Saxons gather.

Numerically the honest men in Grizzly were greatly in the superiority. But they were very busy, they were making money, and before Haggerty's advent they had a strong tendency toward letting well enough alone. Also they had a normal regard for their own lives, and they foresaw that an open clash with Doak's men meant bloodshed. And nothing short of actual destruction of the gang would serve.

If they but drove the desperadoes out to that secret rendezvous of which they boasted so often, then life in Grizzly would be a desperate adventure indeed.

But as it was, there was ceaseless irritation. The very presence of the undesirables was like a challenge. Their mysterious disappearances and returns, followed always by the story of some back-country outrage, kept the camp filled with a certain sense of indignity. And they were bold blusterers for the most part, with a touch of the bully about them, whose loud words goaded to anger far more men than they cowed.

All this helped Haggerty. He was careful in choosing his leaders. He got as the nucleus of his Vigilante organization the soldier men in camp, the two storekeepers, a doctor, a square gambler, half a dozen middle-aged miners. They were already impatient with conditions, and were not hard to enlist. The rest followed slowly. But as the days went by, cohesion set in. Haggerty was confident that, given time, he would have the respectable element of the camp with him to a man.

And now he began to reveal the reward he would ask for, Doak taken alive and delivered into his hands.

The trouble was, all this could not be hidden from the crooks. Their surface reaction to the threat was defiance and an increasing arrogance. But underneath they were growing uneasy. They knew the strength that could be massed against them once it had coalesced. Haggerty heard that the clearer-headed among them were urging Doak to retire from the town. His great fear was that they would have their way before he got ready to strike.

And what of Doak all this time?

IV

IT WAS very beautiful that night. Through trees motionless as sentinels the starlight trickled, close and friendly. The giant ridges were things of loveliness, so softly silhouetted were they against the dusky sky. In the bottom of the gulch the tumbling brook made music ancient as the world. And Rosa and Haggerty, sitting alone by the dying embers of a camp-fire, made believe to forget that there was anything else in the world than the visible harmony that surrounded them, embraced them, and drew their souls together in a spell as simple and clean and sweet as itself.

Rosa's father had gone to bed, and the two had been alone perhaps an hour, when from somewhere above them, from beyond the wall of rocks that half encircled the tent and made Haggerty's position comparatively safe, came the sound of breaking shrubbery.

Instantly Rosa was on her feet, with the fear of Doak on her, and was urging Haggerty out of the circle of light and behind the tent.

Haggerty obeyed, though the visitor seemed to be making too much noise to be dangerous, and so they stood there until Doak rounded the tent and came up to the camp-fire.

The hell of evil passions in which he had presumably writhed the last few weeks had changed him greatly. He was unshaven and shaken and nervous, and he glared suspiciously around in the shadows. When Haggerty, followed by Rosa, stepped forward, his body tensed galvanically, and he emitted an inarticulate growl.

"Well?" from Haggerty.

"Thought I'd find you here," with an attempt at a sneer.

"What do you want?" inquired Haggerty shortly.

"I want to talk with you. And with Rosa, too. I've got something here it'll do you both good to hear about."

A note of malevolent triumph was in his voice; but it was strange how the fear that had never been absent from him since Haggerty's arrival in Grizzly broke through that triumph even then, and tempered it with doubt.

"Well, come to the point," snapped Haggerty.

"I'll come to it quick enough," declared Doak.

His hand went inside his coat. It came out with nothing more ominous than a newspaper, crumpled, dog-eared, and brown with age. But Haggerty drew a sharp breath.

"I sent a man to San Francisco for this," said Doak. "What d'you suppose is in it?"

Haggerty, before whom the past had risen like a specter, gripped himself, collected his wits, and replied coolly:

"Why, I suppose, judging from its apparent age and your manner, that it's an account of the murder of my uncle. It probably has my description in it, too, as the supposed murderer, and mentions the fact that I broke jail, and that there's a thousand dollars reward for my arrest."

Rosa's cry at this abrupt confession was the piteous one of a woman who feels her world tottering to its foundation. But Doak replied with a jeering chuckle:

"Wonder if you'll admit it all as easy when the boys get hold of you? D'you know what I'm goin' to do with this?"

"Why, you're going to tear it up," said Haggerty easily.

"Oh, am I?" grated Doak. "Just am I? I tell you what, I'm givin' you just one more chance for life. If you're out of this camp by sunrise, all right. If you ain't, I'll publish this to the camp, and that'll fix you with your—respectable support, all right. Then I'll get the boys together and string you up for the cowardly murderer you are."

Haggerty, his eyes never leaving Doak, stepped forward and kicked some dry twigs into the middle of the fire.

"A nice program," he said thoughtfully. "This world's a strange place. Seems like we never can get away, doesn't it? Did you ever hear of the law of compensation, Doak?"

Doak said something under his breath.

"Yes," went on Haggerty slowly, "it was a cowardly, cold-blooded crime. For money; there couldn't have been any other motive, and they found part of his money on me. He and I had quarreled, too, and they proved that. I was a boy then—seems more than a year ago, doesn't it?—and pretty impulsive. But he'd taken care of me all my life. Working late at night, shoeing a neighbor's horse—a country cross-roads blacksmith my uncle was, and a farmer, too—and you can see how the murderer came up from behind and struck him down. But there was a struggle.

"Do you know, Doak, I've a curious theory about crime. I believe the criminal's always branded, some way. You can't get away from it, it leaves its mark. Now this particular crime—but we won't talk any more about it. Do as you like. Only it would be strange if I were hung in Grizzly. I was sure I'd found a sign of good luck here."

A peculiar effect these latter rambling words had on Doak. His figure wavered in the dancing firelight, and the paper in his hand stirred and rustled as though it, too, were possessed of quivering nerves.

"What d'you mean by that?" he snarled viciously.

"Why, what do you think I mean?" asked Haggerty lightly. "We all have our superstitions, haven't we? Now," in a voice turned deadly, "you've told your story. We want no more of you. Go and tell it to the camp, if you dare."

"By——, I will," cried Doak.

"If I were afraid of you," said Haggerty, evenly, "wouldn't I shoot you where you stand? Now go!"

Doak's shoulders came forward in a crouch. But he turned away. The menacing crouch and the cautious retreat were one and the same movement. Haggerty drew Rosa swiftly into the shadow of the tent. With his hand on his gun, he watched Doak until he disappeared. Then he turned to Rosa.

"It's all true," he said swiftly, "what was in the paper. I'm wanted—hunted—now—this minute. The other day, on the hill, I asked you a question. I'm asking it again."

"Oh, what—what was it—Jack?"

"Do you believe——"

"No, no! You couldn't. I didn't think—no!" She clung to his arm.

"Then God is good," cried Haggerty, filled with a double joy. "For Doak's the man. I was sure of it, and now——"

He was blinded by a crashing blow. He didn't hear the report of the gun. He felt himself slipping down, felt Rosa's arms around him. He struggled for sight, for strength. He knew he called out Doak's name. He did hear the clatter of a horse's hoofs and the second explosion of the revolver. He felt Rosa dragged away from him. And then he fell into a great depth wherein was nothing but shadows.

He struggled up out of that depth. It took a long time and a great effort, and a sense of necessity that was more terrible than hell-fire urged him. He found himself swaying unsteadily on his feet. There were men holding him. There were more around, a great crowd of them. He heard one say:

"Skull's creased, that's all. Lucky devil."

"Rosa, Rosa!" cried Haggerty, in a terrible voice.

A silence came over that crowd that was like the silence of the utterly damned.

Then some one spoke from the open flap of the tent—"Old Man Brooke has cashed in all right."

"God!" groaned some one after an interval, "can't we do anything?"

"How can we," came the answer, "with our horses druv away?"

"And with Doak and his whole devil's brood gone. If there was one left, one, we'd find a way to the rest."

"It was Doak done this, most likely. He had the rest waitin' by the corral. I heard 'em riding off like mad right away after I heard the shots. It was so we couldn't follow they took the horses."

"Listen!"

A gust of wind had driven down the cañon from the east, and upon it rode like a challenge the retreating sound of a galloping horse.

"Let me go," cried Haggerty, suddenly.

"Lad, you're hurted," came Sheehy's voice.

But strength was flowing back upon Haggerty like a tide, and, flinging off the friendly hands that would have held him, he started on a run up the side of the gulch in the wake of the double-burdened horse.

There were others close behind him when he hit the trail, but they did not last.

V

EXHAUSTION! The triple torment of bursting heart, of straining lungs, of flagging muscles. A brain weary, too, from its constant insistence upon the single idea of just one effort more, and another, and another. The passage from this into a state of sheer physical deadness, in which the body becomes an incumbrance, worse than useless flesh that must be lifted and lifted and driven forward by an overweening will. And then that very will dies into a torturing sense of inevitability, past and future are alike wiped out, and there is nothing else in the world but a grim eternity of endless effort, consciousness absorbed in pain, a madness, an obsession, an agony.

Such were the stages through which Haggerty passed in his pursuit of Doak, but when that last stage came it was not punishment, but a very great relief. For there are mental agonies that pass the physical, and in the moment of his discovery of Rosa's abduction, Haggerty had thought to go mad. Black dogs of nameless horror threatened the citadel of his mind, and remorse flayed his soul like a scorpion-tipped whip.

Remorse, for was he not himself to blame? Had he not, in sickening truth, played Rosa as a pawn, played her attractions to hold Doak in Grizzly? Now nothing mattered but Rosa's safety, but like a whisper from a barbed tongue was the thought, "Too late, too late!" until that horrible numbness came like a blessing.

He had started from the camp of catastrophe shortly after midnight. At first his reason held him down to the easy, falling stride of the distance runner. Very shortly this stride became a necessity.

There were three things that gave him hope, the horse was double-loaded, for Doak had evidently no desire to explain to his followers his use for a second mount, the trail was worn wide and plain by the immigrant wagons, and he was trained down to the finest point. By lucky chance he was wearing riding-breeches and light shoes. He threw off coat and upper shirt, and threw away half of his cartridges. He would have thrown away the gold dust in his hip pocket, but he forgot it.

Very little light came through the trees that overhung his path. Haggerty stumbled often and sometimes fell headlong. But he was always up again and going, and he never quite lost the sound of the hoof-beats ahead.

Once Doak pulled his horse down to a walk. Then Haggerty's dimming consciousness was shot through with the delirium of hope. Surely he could overtake him now. A Berserker rage came to Haggerty, and he felt his hands on his enemy's throat. Then Doak, his horse rested, was off again on a gallop. This happened again and again, and each time was a torment.

Haggerty never halted, never consciously slackened his pace. He knew if he did he would never get started again. But deeper rooted still was the knowledge that as he was running he would continue to run until he caught Doak, or lost him hopelessly, or died of a broken heart.

He ran on for hours, for days, for endless years, it seemed. After a while the only sense impression he had was that of the sound he followed. The stars began to pale, the eastern sky grew purple. The early Summer dawn came rushing over the hills to meet him, and he did not know it.

It was broad daylight, and he had not realized it. He wondered what made him realize it now. Then he knew, for the crooked trail had turned straight, and plain in view perhaps half a mile ahead was a horse with two riders.

Haggerty tried to run faster, but his legs would not respond. A desperate anger came over him. It was an anger directed against his body, a faulty mechanism that failed him in stress.

But he kept on in the same jogging trot. His breathing racked him from the diaphragm upward; the sound of it was like a sobbing. Blood had matted on his face, and, where it was not, the skin showed purple with the unoxygenized life fluid. Above his hips his muscles were loose, lax, so his trunk was held insecurely to its pivot, and swayed as he ran.

A little later, his quarry disappeared down a declivity. When Haggerty got to the edge of the cañon into which the trail descended, Doak was nowhere in sight. And yet Haggerty could see a long way ahead.

Puzzled, he descended to the cañon's bottom, and then he understood. To the right the cañon was blocked with a landslide, but to the left it was open, with a flooring of broken rocks. And he stood considering what to do.

His changed posture made Haggerty aware of the bulge on his hip. He took out the sack of dust and dumped half its contents on a rock in the middle of the trail. Then with his teeth he worried a hole in the sack so the rest would sift out slowly. Holding it in his hand, he turned into the cañon. For quite a distance the way he took was marked with yellow dust.

His pace was a shamble. The way was hazardous with holes and abrupt descents. Haggerty fell often. He did not always rise again immediately. But when he fell it was forward, and when he was down he made way on hands and knees.

He followed no tracks, but on that hard bottom there could have been no tracks to follow.

After a while, as through a thick, red mist, he saw Doak again. Doak was an unthinkable distance ahead. He was picking his way on foot, leading the horse, in the saddle of which still sat the woman.

And again Doak disappeared. He disappeared mysteriously. With a snarl at his failing senses, Haggerty brushed the sweat from his eyes and stared again. Where Doak had been there was a patch of underbrush. Haggerty reached that underbrush, and stopped.

He dropped flat to the ground, and wriggled into the bushes. Looking all ways, he came to where he thought the wall of the cañon should have been, and there was no wall there.

There was vacancy there. A hole, it seemed, opening straight into the face of the cliff. A tunnel higher than a man, and broader, from which came a grumbling voice:

"What the devil's that? Good Lord, a woman!"

"Lend a hand here. Take the nag," replied Doak surlily.

"There ain't no one watchin' here but me," objected the voice.

"Never mind. I got away clean. There's no danger."

Hoof-beats and footsteps receded into the earth. Haggerty gathered his strength and followed. His legs had become incumbrances. He dragged himself with his hands and writhed along.

A square of light appeared ahead of him. Outlined against it were four figures. One man had hold of a woman's arm. The other led the horse. Suddenly all four passed beyond that square of light and melted into a confusion of moving forms.

Haggerty struggled on to the end of the passage. With his body twisted behind a projecting rock, he stole a look into the rock-bound chamber.

Just within the entrance stood Doak, with his hand on Rosa's arm. Fronting them at various distances were perhaps twenty-five men, most of whom Haggerty had seen in Grizzly. Against the opposite wall of the rendezvous were tethered the horses. There were many cases of goods and ammunition boxes there, too. The whole place was dimly lighted with two oil-lamps, bracketed near the entrance.

"Lord, Doak, this ain't no place for a woman," Haggerty heard one man say.

"That's all right," replied Doak sharply. "Simpson you go guard the tunnel."

And Doak began to lead Rosa across the front of the crowd, to the right.

Haggerty saw he was making for a narrow opening in the wall, beyond which looked to be another and smaller chamber. Rosa saw it, too, for she cried out and began to struggle. Protesting growls mingled with the brutal laughs of the men, but none stirred to help her. And then Haggerty had never felt stronger in his life, and he pulled his gun and fired.

As he fired, he leaped. He was on Doak before Doak struck the floor. Blood smeared Haggerty's hand as he gripped Doak by the right shoulder and dragged him toward the breach in the wall, leading into the inner chamber. Doak's revolver, instantly drawn, clattered against the floor. Rosa snatched it up. Haggerty shoved her violently ahead of him. A bullet whistled past Haggerty's head as he followed Rosa through the opening. The next instant he had jerked Doak inside the second chamber and whirled around, his revolver swaying level like a serpent's head, searching for a target.

VI

HE HAD acted without plan, wholly on impulse, and it was with astonishment that he realized there was no target there, and that for the moment at least he held the outlaws at an impasse. His range of vision commanded the outer end and exit of the chamber; when he had made his rush the outlaws had been back of this space, and they stayed there, fulminating threats and curses. The net situation was that if they held him prisoner, prisoners he also held them.

Also he held another advantage. His first words, cutting sharply into their jumble of voices, reminded them of this:

"Rosa, the first shot that's fired in here, kill Doak. You out there, you know me. Keep back."

Their talk died away at this, and then one voice replied bullyingly—

"——, young fellow, you can't bluff us all."

"I can kill half a dozen of you, though," replied Haggerty with apparent conviction. He thanked God they did not know how he was trembling from head to foot with exhaustion.

"We'll get you in the end, though."

Haggerty did not reply. The fact was

incontestable. One man could not stand forever against twenty-five. Nor could the outlaws afford to let either him or Rosa escape with the secret of their personnel and hiding-place. The situation was as hopeless as could be imagined.

"Say, young fellow, let's call it quits," came the offer. "You let Doak go, and we'll let you go. We'll let you leave here safe. That's a promise."

"And the girl?" asked Haggerty.

"Sure," replied the man, readily.

"How do we know you'll let us go?"

"Ain't our word good?"

Haggerty laughed shortly.

"You'll have to do better than that."

"All right, then," replied the bargainer, angrily. "We can do that, too."

"What about Doak?" Haggerty replied to the threat.

"Well," said the man deliberately, "Doak was —— fool enough to get us into this."

And then Haggerty knew that his best card had failed him. He could imagine that Doak's power over his men had recently been slipping. Fear is very ruinous to leadership, and Doak of late had been very much afraid.

He was afraid now. Amid a stream of curses at his men, at Haggerty, at everything, he demanded if Haggerty meant to let him bleed to death.

Haggerty passed back a knife and handkerchief, and Rosa set to work to bandage his wound as best she might.

Haggerty never stirred from his post. The rest was doing him good; he was steadier now. He wondered how the outlaws would go about it to accomplish their threat.

He wasn't left long in doubt. A brisk hammering began without, the splintering of wood, and the creaking of nails wrenched from their sockets. Haggerty remembered the packing-cases and ammunition boxes, and he knew they were being shaped into a movable barricade. He wondered whether at the last moment he had not better turn Rosa over to the desperadoes, trusting what remnants of white manhood there might be in them. He decided not.

He was roused from a spell of black and remorseful brooding by Rosa's excited voice.

"Why," she cried, "there's a scar here. On his shoulder!"

"There is?" said Haggerty, almost indifferently.

"A scar, a burn, the shape of—of a horseshoe!"

Her voice was full of significance and a question.

"Yes," said Haggerty, "you've guessed it. The same mark was on my uncle's body in half a dozen places. The burn of a horseshoe white hot from the forge. It fell to the floor, and they struggled over it, and I figured his murderer couldn't escape. And I was sure it was Doak. Doak had been working for him; he'd quit and gone two days before, but that was a trick. I knew he wanted to get to the gold fields, and hadn't the money."

"Why, that explains——"

"Everything," said Haggerty, dully. "My talk of brands, and why Doak was afraid to accuse me, and—why you're here. I drove him mad, Rosa, with fear and jealousy and hate, and I never thought of you. I deserve to die—but you——"

"Hush!" said Rosa. "You saved me from—you are dying for me. There's no chance, is there, Jack?"

He was silent. He could not bring himself to tell her there was none, yet how could he bid her hope?

"—— you," said Doak weakly, "you'll both die with me like rats!"

And then, minute by minute, a long time dragged away. It might have been an hour. The sound of the preparations for attack went on unceasingly. To Haggerty the suspense became almost unendurable. If he had been alone he would have leaped out and ended it all in one quick flurry of fight.

Once from Rosa a curious question, considering what was impending.

"Jack, why did you—run away?"

"I was a young fool," said Haggerty. "I was afraid. I thought they'd convict me. I had part of his money, you know, and we'd quarreled—that was the reason I had his money, he'd given it to me, and I was going away."

"You wouldn't do it now," said Rosa.

"No," said Haggerty, "I wouldn't do it now."

Man-like, he wondered at her woman's sigh of relief. It was the one blot she knew of on his shield.

Close upon that came their warning of imminent doom, the scraping upon the rocks of the wooden barricade. Its further end came into view. How thick it was

Haggerty could not tell, nor how it was held upright; but it was loop-holed at convenient intervals, and it was high enough so that Haggerty could catch no glimpse of the crouching bodies that pushed it forward.

Haggerty felt a light touch on his shoulder.

"Jack, you may—kiss me—now."

A moment later the muzzle of a gun appeared in one of the loop-holes. Haggerty fired, and by luck and good marksmanship, managed to drive his bullet through the opening.

The curses of the wounded outlaw were checked by the harsh voice of his leader.

"Serves you right. Mind what I said, the rest of you. Not a shot until we can give him a volley."

Thereafter the barricade came on steadily, and with motive power as invisible as though the planks themselves had been granted life. It swung out as a gate is turned, the end nearer Haggerty's refuge almost immovable, the further end sweeping clear across the cave. It was a terrible thing to see it coming and not to be able to check it, and to anticipate the storm of bullets that would burst from it the moment it got into position. It was a more terrible thing to imagine Rosa's body riddled horribly and lying limp and bloody. . . .

"We don't want to kill the girl," came the offer. "If she'll come out, we won't."

Haggerty hesitated, but Rosa cried out, "No, no!" and there was an end of that.

Doak was alternately cursing and praying in maudlin fashion; Haggerty was bathed in cold sweat, and he found himself longing for the end of everything.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, the barricade advanced. Now it cut across Haggerty's field of view, and crept past the mouth of the tunnel. And now in the dark mouth of the tunnel Haggerty saw a shadowy moving shape.

He saw several, and one stepped tentatively within the cave, back of the outlaws, and with a wave of the arm summoned the others. And instantly Haggerty called out with a careful simulation of broken nerve:

"Say, there, you! There's no use of this. We'll come out."

"No use of that, now. We've got you."

"I'll get some of you, though. You know that."

"We've figured it different. We're willin' to take the chance."

"But the girl and Doak! You don't want to kill them, too. I tell you, we'll all come out."

"Well, what d'ye say, boys? Saves ammunition. All right, they say, come out, then."

"Rosa, are you ready?"

"Just a minute," she took her cue from the thin line of hard-visaged men that were filing with Indian stealth through the entrance of the rendezvous.

"Make yourself beautiful, miss," jeered the outlaw. "But we ain't waiting no longer than that."

"All right," said Haggerty at the end of the allotted time.

"Throw your guns out first," came the order.

"I don't see the necessity for that," objected Haggerty. "One man won't start anything with twenty-five."

"The —— you don't. It's me runnin' this game. Throw 'em out."

"Besides, I've only got two guns," said Haggerty, evenly. "What do they matter, when there are fifty guns pointed at your heads?"

A moment of terrible silence during which Death waited on the decision of the outlaws to surrender or give fight; but there are few symbols of eternal blackness so paralysing as the black muzzle of a loaded revolver; and the tension was broken by Sheehy's joyful voice:

"Bedad, 'tis hard after wearin' your feet to the bones for twenty miles not to have even the pleasure of a ruction. Haggerty, lad, 'twas your golden trail that saved ye, and the mystery of the sound of hammerin' coming out of the solid face of a cliff. And now, ye shpalpeens, pay up to the miners' court, the only court of no appeal."

A MONTH later Rosa and Haggerty were leaning on the rail of a small stream craft that plowed westward around the curves of a wide and beautiful river. Illimitable plains of green and brown bordered that river on either side, stretching away until, somewhere over the curve of the earth, they met distant blue hills. Everywhere were washes of color where the wild flowers grew, orange and blue and purple; thousands upon thousands of blackbirds dipped to meet the boat; and against the saffron sky were long lines of waterfowl, their necks outstretched.

"It is a wonderful country," said Haggerty with a note of sadness.

"It is beautiful here," assented Rosa.

"There's work and wealth here for millions," said Haggerty slowly. "The gold is only the lure, it's the land that counts. Some day there'll be a city on that flat we just passed, and wheat from this valley will feed it, and help feed the world besides. It's a kingdom men have come into here."

In spite of himself he spoke wistfully. That for which he had come to this country was finished; Doak was under guard below and on the way to expiate the first of his crimes; but the country itself, vast and new, fresh as from the hand of God and all fitted for man's occupancy and struggles and triumphs, gripped at Haggerty's soul.

"But you are leaving it," said Rosa, with a catch in her breath, "for me!"

"Dear heart, don't think I mind it," said Haggerty swiftly.

He did; but the land had treated Rosa ill, and he knew how the settled orderliness of her old home called to her.

"But I do," said Rosa, "and I—I've been thinking. I learned a lot that last month in Grizzly. I thought the miners were—were savages, Jack; but I found they were men. Men needing, maybe, the influence of—of people like you and me. And I wouldn't mind—I wouldn't——"

Really, the old, old law was working upon them both, the law that bids a man cling to his work, and the woman to her man.

"If you mean," said Haggerty gravely, "that all this unsettled condition will pass, it will. Think how it was in Grizzly, where we used the very wealth of the outlaws, stolen wealth, to establish civil government and pay the officers of law and order. That's the way it will be everywhere. It seems to me sometimes there's something that turns everything to good, even the forces of evil. But it will take time. Would you be happy in the meantime, Rosa?"

"With you?" questioned Rosa. And then, in an altogether different tone, "With you, Jack, anywhere. And I'd rather stay."

THE ROAD TO FRANCE

BY A. MOYNAHAN

OH, THE road to France is a long, long road.
 Over the gray-green sea
It stretches away to a far, far land;
 It takes you away from me.

Oh, the road to France is a sad, sad road
 As it chafes in its ceaseless play.
As it tosses and rolls 'round the gallant ships
 With its waves so cruel and gray.

But the road to France is a glorious road
 Where only the brave may go—
Where Liberty's sons with their starry flag
 Will vanquish a hated foe.

And the road from France will be gay and glad
 When the sons of the Free return
And Liberty's lamp in the beautiful west
 Will bright through the ages burn.

LUCK

by George L. Catton

Author of "The Gift of Experience," "Soap," etc.

THE pendulum of the fortunes of men swings one way, and one man wins. Then it swings the other way, and a man loses. And men call it "Luck."

But is it?

Ted Carling threw two hundred pounds of youthful ambition and four days' grub into the trail and broke out with the stampede. He was the last man. Ted had been asleep when "Old Pete" Johnson finally succumbed to the ancient get-him-drunk-enough-to-talk scheme and disclosed the source of his bulky poke. Ted had no hand in that. But when he awoke to the swift rasp of many feet in the snow going by his cabin and learned the reason for it! The spirit-tube hanging outside his window said thirty-five below when he snapped the padlock on his cabin door and swung into the trail.

Ted grinned grimly. Before him in the glow of "The Lights," stretched out upon the flats like a long black snake across the glittering snow, a line of fully fifty old-timers and as many more newcomers like himself drove leg muscles mercilessly. Ahead of them, forty miles straight north lay Old Pete Johnson's strike and Poplar Creek. Forty miles north, ten—twelve—fourteen hours straight-away for those who could stand the pace. Poplar Creek lay rigid in its Winter bed; its frost-expanding waters, somewhere along its course, biting off little knobs and big flakes of heavy, dull-yellow metal; little knobs and big flakes to carry down in the rotting ice in the Spring and sink to the bottom—on somebody's claim. And Ted had determined to own one of those claims.

Six feet, even, in his moccasins—"Legs" they called him—hard as twenty-two years of strenuous honest living could pack him, fresh and eager from eight solid hours of dreamless sleep, Ted ate up the trail. Yard after yard after yard, swiftly and surely, his pounding feet closed up the gap between him and the tail of that long black snake. Mile after mile of the creaking foot-packed trail slipped away behind him. Then he caught up.

Three hours out Ted caught up with, and passed with a nod, a dozen panting men: panting weaklings who would soon turn back. Two hours later he set the pace for a team of trail-green new men, and laughed over his shoulder when he bade them good-by. A mile farther he swung out to pass the leaders of the rear half of the "snake"; and when the brief day edged up in the south there were just six men ahead of him on the last five miles to the creek.

Old-timers those six were, stampeders in more than one rush. And with the wisdom of experience they had held well back to the middle of the line, to the trail packed to slide on. Then, passing with a sudden spurt the fagged trail-breakers, they strung out a quarter-mile apart in a frenzied race across that last lap of five miles of unbroken snow.

But they couldn't shake Ted. Of average height, the six stepped exactly into each other's footprints—footprints too close together for Ted's long legs. Nevertheless, Ted gained with every stride. Barring accidents or trickery . . . .

But nothing was barred in the Poplar Creek stampede. The third man ahead of Ted stumbled and went down. When he got up he sat down again. Those immediately behind him raced past. Ted stopped.

"All in?" he grinned.

"All in, ——!" came the snarling answer. "Look't that!" And he held up his right foot.

The moccasin on that foot was slit the full length of the sole and red with blood, and carefully buried in one of the hard-packed imprints of the pounding feet ahead pointed up and back the six-inch, needle-pointed blade of a game-knife!

Ted dropped to his knee, snorting his surprise and disgust. The next minute he was on his feet again. A dozen haggard men raced past, but he paid no attention. It was thirty-odd miles back to Kelly's, and this man couldn't travel.

A half-hour later Ted threw his fifth huge armful of wood down beside the roaring fire and grabbed up his pack. Said he—

"I'll be back as soon as I stake."

And he was back on the trail again.

There were eleven men in sight when the leader of the stampede reached Old Pete Johnson's claim at the mouth of Poplar Creek. Ted was the eleventh. And the eleventh five-hundred-foot claim would place its owner over a mile up the creek valley—over a mile away from the original strike. And that was too far!

Old Pete Johnson was an old prospector. Not a man of those there who knew him but knew that Old Pete would cover the whole creek before he settled down. And when Old Pete staked he would measure off a full five hundred feet of the very heart of the find. If there was any color worth working outside Old Pete's claim, it would be found next to that claim, up the creek—the deep silent river flowed by on the other side. Two or three claims up-stream—there was a chance; five or six—a possibility. But a mile up!

But Ted didn't get the eleventh claim. A man behind him got that. Men behind him got the eleventh and the twelfth and—Ted stood guard.

REACHING the mouth of Poplar Creek Ted found that one of those ahead of him had jumped Old Pete Johnson's claim and was restaking it. Whether or not he was the man who had planted the knife in the trail, Ted didn't know—no one ever knew anything about that. But that didn't matter. Ted stopped.

"Blind, can't see, or what?" He challenged shortly. "Didn't you see Old Pete's notice?"

"Huh!" the jumper snorted. "Old Pete ain't never registered. If he had, we'd 'a' heard o' this before."

Ted's fingers in his mitt knotted to an iron fist. His long arm shot straight out. The first fight was on.

Then with the arrival of the crowd came the general mix-up.

Axes bit off the stunted spruce, and men fought for the stakes. Grub-packs and blankets were tossed aside, and men fought for position. Mitts were lost, parkas were torn off, and men fought for breath. And when the flying snow finally settled down again, the creek was claimed upstream for a full three miles and only one of the thirty who had lasted the forty miles had failed to stake.

That man was Ted.

Ted stayed on Old Pete Johnson's claim. Down at Kelly's, when Old Pete Johnson sobered enough to realize what his intoxicated tongue had done, he staggered into the registry office and saved his claim. But Ted didn't know that. It needed but five minutes of Ted's flying fists to send the claim-jumper on up the creek. But there were others. Then when the race back to register had left the creek deserted, and not till then, Ted moved.

When Ted started anything, he finished

it. Just because he had come for that purpose he staked a claim. With his right eye turning blue and rapidly closing and a hopeless grin on his swollen features, Ted walked three miles up the creek and measured off the last claim staked. Then he started back.

The stampede was history when Ted registered that claim. Sixty hours after the last man was in, Ted staggered into Kelly's with yet another man across his shoulders. And that man had a right foot swollen to three times its normal size. The frost had got into the knife-wound in the sole.

And the men who had taken part in the stampede, the men who knew all the circumstances, shrugged their shoulders and said—

"Tough luck."

Then came the second stampede to Poplar Creek, and Ted was in that, too.

The sun came back, the ice broke up and roared down to the river, and Poplar Creek was again a living stream. Men waded out knee-deep into the numbing waters with their pans, washed sand and cursed, washed sand and cursed, and went back to Kelly's. Of the thirty-one who had staked claims on Poplar Creek but six stayed.

Old Pete Johnson and the four men above him washed sand and grinned. But three miles up the creek, on the last claim staked, Ted Carling . . . .

Ted climbed out on to the bank and threw his pan into the bushes. He wasn't disappointed. He had staked that claim simply because he had mushed forty miles for that purpose, and he always finished what he started. He threw his long arms above his head and yawned—and sat down in the creek!

Ted was a big man and heavy, and the throwing up of his long arms added suddenly to his weight. The overhanging bank he stood on sagged, and tore loose.

The water was numbingly cold—the ice had been out only a few days. The creek bottom was stony there—a hard seat. But Ted sat still. Ted sat still and laughed.

Old Pete Johnson and the four men above him were standing out in the creek. They were panning sand and finding little knobs and big flakes of gold where the rotting ice that carried them down began to drop them. But Ted Carling sat in the creek. Ted was staring at a big raw spot where an overhanging bank had broken off under his weight. Ted had staked the spot where the frost-expanding waters of the Winter creek had bitten off all those little knobs and big flakes.

And the men who took part in the stampede, the men who knew all the circumstances, shrugged their shoulders and said—

"Great luck."

And Ted claimed—

WHEN Ted Carling got back to his little home village his mother backed him up into a corner and demanded the reason for his sudden wealth. And Ted laughed and said—

"Oh, just luck."

The pendulum of the fortunes of men swings one way, and one man wins. Then it swings the other way, and a man loses. And men call it "Luck."

But is it?

THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN

A FOUR-PART STORY

PART I

by Jackson Gregory

Author of "Yahoya," "Silver Slippers," etc.

HE WHO has not heard the bells of San Juan has a journey yet to make. He who has not set foot upon the dusty road which is the one street of San Juan, at times the most silent and deserted of thoroughfares, at other times a most mad and turbulent lane between sun-dried adobe walls, may yet learn something of man and his hopes, desires, fears and ruder passions from a pinpoint upon the great southwestern map.

The street runs due north and south pointing like a compass to the flat, gray desert in the one direction, to the broken hills swept up into the San Juan Mountains in the other. At the northern end, that is toward the more inviting mountains, is the old mission. To right and left of the whitewashed corridors in a straggling garden of pear-trees and olives and yellow roses are two rude arches made of seasoned cedar. From the top cross-beam of each hang three bells.

They have their history, these bells of San Juan and the biggest with its deep, mellow voice, the smallest with its golden chimes, seem to be chanting it when they ring. Each swinging tongue has its tale to tell, a tale of old Spain, of Spanish galleons and Spanish gentlemen adventurers, of gentle-voiced priests and somber-eyed Indians, of conquest, revolt, intrigue and sudden death.

When a baby is born in San Juan, a rarer occurrence than a strong man's death, the littlest of the bells upon the western arch laughs while it calls to all to harken; when a man is killed the angry-toned bell pendant from the eastern arch shouts out the word to go billowing across the stretches of sage and greasewood and gama grass; if one of the later day frame buildings bursts into flame Ignacio Chavez warns the town with a strident clamor, tugging frantically; be it wedding or discovery of gold or returns from the country elections, the bell ringer cunningly makes the bells talk.

Out on the desert a man might stop and listen, forming his surmise as the sounds surged out through the heat and silence. He might smile, if he knew San Juan, as he caught the jubilant message of the tones tapped swiftly out of the bronze bell which had come, men said, with Coronado; he might sigh at the lugubrious, slow swelling voice of the big bell which had come hitherward long ago with the retinue of Marco de Niza, wondering what old friend or enemy, perchance, had at last closed his ears to all of Ignacio Chavez's music. Or, at a sudden fury of clanging, the man far out on the desert might hurry on, cursing and goading his burro impatiently, to know what great event had occurred in the old adobe town of San Juan.

It is three hundred and fifty years and more since the six bells of San Juan came into the new world and tolled across that land of quiet mystery which is the southwest. It is a hundred years since an all but forgotten priest, Francisco Calderon, found them in various devastated mission churches, assembled them and set them chiming in the old garden. Where, among the pear-trees and olives and yellow roses, they still cast their shadows in sun and moonlight, in silence and in echoing chimes.

CHAPTER I

IGNACIO CHAVEZ, Mexican that he styled himself, Indian that the community deemed him or "breed" of badly mixed blood that he probably was, made his loitering way along the street toward the mission. A thin, yellowish-brown *cigarita* dangling from his lips, his wide, dilapidated conical hat tilted to the left side of his head in a listless sort of consession to the westering sun, he was, as was customary with him, utterly at peace.

Ten minutes ago he had had twenty cents; two minutes after the acquiring of his elusive wealth he had exchanged the two dimes for whisky at the Casa Blanca; the remaining eight minutes of the ten he required to make his way, as he naively put it, "between hell and heaven."

For from a corner of the peaceful old mission garden at one end of the long street one might catch a glimpse of the Casa Blanca at the other end sprawling in the sun; between the two sturdy walled buildings had the town strung itself as it grew. As old a relic as the church itself was La Casa Blanca and, since San Juan could remember, in all matters antipodal to the religious calm of the padre's monument. Deep-shaded doorways let into the three-feet-thick earthen walls, waxed floors, green tables and bar and cool-looking glasses—a place which invited, lured, held and frequently enough finally damned.

San Juan, in the languid philosophy of Ignacio Chavez, was what you will. It epitomized the universe. You had everything here which the soul of man might covet. Never having dwelt elsewhere since his mother bore him here upon the rim of the desert and with the San Juan Mountains so near that, Ignacio Chavez pridefully knew, a man standing upon the Mesa Alta might hear the ringing of his bells, he experienced a pitying contempt for all those other spots in the world which were so plainly less favored.

What do you wish, señor? Fine warm days? You have them here. Nice cool nights for sound slumber? Right here in San Juan, *amigo mio*. A desert across which the eye may run without stopping until it be tired, a wonderful desert whereon at dawn and dusk God weaves all of the alluring soft mists of mystery. Shaded cañons at noonday with water and birds and flowers. Behold the mountains. Everything desirable, in short.

That there might be men who desired the splash of waves, the sheen of wet beaches, the boom of surf, did not suggest itself to one who had never seen the ocean. So, then, San Juan was "what you will." A man may fix his eye upon the little mission cross which is always pointing to heaven and God; or he may pass through the shaded doors of the Casa Blanca which, men say, give exit into hell the shortest way.

Ignacio, having meditatively enjoyed his whisky and listened smilingly to the tinkle of a mandolin in the *patio* under a grapevine arbor, had rolled his cigaret and turned his back square upon the devil—of whom he no longer had anything to ask. As he went out he stopped in the doorway long enough to rub his back against a corner of the wall and to strike a match. Then, almost inaudibly humming the mandolin air, he slouched out into the burning street.

For twenty years he had striven with the weeds in the mission garden and no man during that time dared say which had had the best of it, Ignacio Chavez or the interloping alfileria and purslane. In the matters of a vast leisureliness and tumbling along the easiest way they resembled each other, these two avowed enemies.

For twenty years he had looked upon the bells as his own, had filled his eye with them day after day, had looked the first thing in the morning to see that they were there, regarding them as solicitously in the rare rainy weather as his old mother regarded her few mongrel chicks. Twenty full years, and yet Ignacio Chavez was not more than thirty years old, or thirty-five perhaps. He did not know, no one cared.

He was on his way to attack with his bare brown hands some of the weeds which were spilling over into the walk which led through the garden and to the priest's house. As a matter of fact he had awakened with this purpose in mind, had gone his lazy way all day fully purposing to give it his attention, and had at last arrived upon the scene.

The front gate had finally broken, the upper hinge worn out; Ignacio carefully set the ramshackly wooden affair back against the fence thinking how one of these days he would repair it. Then he went between the bigger pear-tree and the *lluvia d'oro* which his own hands had planted here and stood with legs well apart considering the three bells upon the easterly arch.

"*Que hay, amigos!*" he greeted them. "Do you know what I am going to do for you some fine day? I will build a little roof over you that runs down both ways to shut out the water when it rains. It will make you hoarse, too much rain."

That was one of the few dreams of Ignacio's life; one day he was going to make a little roof over each arch. But today he merely regarded affectionately the Captain—that was the biggest of the bells—the Dancer, second in size, and Lolita, the smallest upon this arch. Then he sighed and turned toward the other arch across the garden to see how it was with the Little One, La Golondrina and Ignacio Chavez. For it was only fair that at least one of the six should bear his name.

Changing his direction thus, moving directly toward the dropping sun, he shifted his hat well over his eyes and so was constrained to note how the weeds were asserting themselves with renewed insolence. He muttered a soft "*maldito!*" at them which might have been mistaken for a caress and determined upon a merciless campaign of extermination just as soon as he could have fitted a new handle to his hoe.

Then he paused in front of the mission steps and lifted his hat, made an elegant bow and smiled in his own inimitable remarkably fascinating way. For, under the ragged brim, his eyes had caught a glimpse of a pretty pair of patent-leather slippers, a prettier pair of black stockinged ankles and the hem of a white starched skirt.

Nowhere are there eyes like the eyes of old Mexico. Deep and soft and soulful, though the man himself may have a soul like a bit of charred leather; velvety and tender though they may belong to an out-and-out cutthroat; expressive, eloquent even, though they are the eyes of a peon with no mind to speak of; night black and like the night filled with mystery. Ignacio Chavez lifted such eyes to the eyes of the girl who had been watching him and spontaneously gave her the last iota of his ready admiration.

"It is a fine day, señorita," he told her, displaying two glistening rows of superb teeth friendliwise. "And the garden—*ah, que es mas bonita en todo el mundo?* You like it, no?"

It was slow music when Ignacio Chavez spoke, all liquid sounds and tender cadences. When he had cursed the weeds it was like love-making. A "d" in his mouth became a softened "th;" from the lips of such as the bell-ringer of San Juan the snapping gringo oath comes metamorphosed into a gentle "Gah-tham!" The girl, to whom the speech of Chavez was something as new and strange as the face of the earth about her, regarded him with grave curious eyes.

SHE was seated upon the little bench against the mission wall which no one but Ignacio guessed was to be painted green one of these fine days, a bronze-haired, gray-eyed girl in white skirt and waist and with a wide panama hat caught between her clasped hands and her knee. For a moment she was perhaps wondering how to take him; then with a suddenness that had been all unheralded in her former gravity, she smiled. With lips and eyes together as though she accepted his friendship. Ignacio's own smile broadened and he nodded his delight.

"It is truly beautiful here," she admitted, and had Ignacio possessed a tithe of that sympathetic comprehension which his eyes lied about he would have detected a little note of eagerness in her voice, would even have guessed that she was lonely and craved human companionship. "I have been sitting here an hour or two. You are not going to send me away, are you?"

Ignacio looked properly horrified.

"If I saw an angel here in the garden, señorita," he exclaimed, "would I say *sape* to it? No, no, señorita; here you shall stay a thousand years if you wish. I swear it."

He was all sincerity; Ignacio Chavez would no sooner think of being rude to a beautiful young woman than of crying "Scat!" to an angel. But as to staying here a thousand years—she glanced through the tangle of the garden to the tiny graveyard and shook her head.

"You have just come to San Juan?" he asked. "Today?"

"Yes," she told him. "On the stage at noon."

"You have friends here?"

Again she shook her head.

"Ah," said Ignacio.

He straightened for a brief instant and she could see how the chest under his shirt inflated.

"A tourist. You have heard of this garden, maybe? And the bells? So you traveled across the desert to see?"

The third time she shook her head.

"I have come to live here," she returned quietly.

"But not all alone, señorita!"

"Yes." She smiled at him again. "All alone."

"Mother of God!" he said within himself. And presently to her, "I did not see the stage come today; in San Juan one takes his siesta at that hour. And it is not often that the stage brings new people from the railroad."

In some subtle way he had made of his explanation an apology. While his slow brown fingers rolled a cigaret he stared away through the garden and across the desert with an expression half-melancholy, half-merely meditative which made the girl wonder what his thoughts were. When she came to know him better she would know, too, that at times like this he was not thinking at all.

"I think that this is the most profoundly peaceful place in the world," said the girl quietly, half-listlessly setting into words the impression which had clung about her throughout the long, still day. "It is like a strange dream town; one sees no one moving about, hears nothing. It is just a little sad, isn't it?"

He had followed her until the end, comprehending. But sad? How was that? It was just as it should be; to ears which had never been filled with the noises or rushing trains and cars and all of the traffic of a city, what sadness could there be in the very natural calm of the rim of the desert? Having no satisfactory reply to make, Ignacio merely muttered "*Sí, señorita*," somewhat helplessly and let it go at that.

"Tell me," she continued, sitting up a little and seeming to throw off the oppressively heavy spell of her environment, "who are the important people hereabouts?"

La gente? Oh, Ignacio knew them well, all of them! There was Señor Engle, to begin with. The banker of whom no doubt she had heard? He owned a big *residencia* just yonder; you could catch the gleam of its white walls through a clump of cottonwoods, withdrawn aloofly from San Juan's street. Many men worked for him; he had big cattle and sheep ranches throughout the country; he paid well and loaned out much money. Also he had a beautiful wife and a truly marvelously beautiful daughter. And horses such as one could not look upon elsewhere.

Then there was Señor Nortone, as Ignacio pronounced him; a sincere friend of Ignacio Chavez and a man fearless and true and extravagantly to be admired who, it appeared, was the sheriff. Not a family man; he was too young yet. But soon; oh, one could see! It would be Ignacio who would ring the bells for the wedding when Roderico married himself with the daughter of the banker.

"He is what you call a gunman, isn't he?" asked the girl, interested. "I heard two of the men on the stage talking of him. They called him Roddy Norton; he is the one, isn't he?"

Seguro; sure, he was the one. A gunman? Ignacio shrugged. He was sheriff and what must a sheriff be if not a gunman?

"On the stage," continued the girl, "was a man they called Doc; and another named Galloway. They are San Juan men, are they not?"

Ignacio lifted his brows a shade disdainfully. They were both San Juan citizens but obviously not to his liking. Jim Galloway was a big man, yes; but of *la gente,* never! The *señorita* should look the other way when he passed. He owned the Casa Blanca; that was enough to ticket him and Ignacio passed quickly to *el señor doctor*. Oh, he was smart and did much good to the sick; but the poor Mexican who called him for a bed-ridden wife must first sell something and show the money.

Beyond these it appeared that the enviable class of San Juan consisted of the Padre José, who was at present and much of the time away visiting the poor and sick throughout the countryside; Julius Struve who owned and operated the local hotel, one of the lesser luminaries though a portly gentleman with an amiable wife; the Porters who had a farm off to the northwest and whose connection to San Juan lay in the fact that an old maid daughter taught the school here; various other individuals and family groups to be disposed of with a word and a careless wave of a cigaret. Already for the fair stranger Ignacio had skimmed the cream of the cream.

The girl sighed as though her question had been no idle one and his reply had disappointed her. For a moment her brows gathered slightly into a frown that was like a faint shadow; then she smiled again brightly, a quick smile which seemed more at home in her eyes than the frown had been.

Ignacio glanced from her to the weeds, then, squinting his eyes, at the sun. There was ample time, it would be cooler presently. So, describing a respectful arc about her he approached the mission wall, slipped into the shade and eased himself in characteristic indolence against the white-washed adobe. She appeared willing to talk with him; well, then, what pleasanter way to spend an afternoon? She sought to learn this and that of a land new to her; who to explain more knowingly than Ignacio Chavez?

After a little, when she rose to go, he would pluck some of the newly opened yellow rosebuds for her, making her a little speech about herself and budding flowers. He would even, perhaps, show her his bells, let her hear just the suspicion of a note from each.

A sharp sound which came to her abruptly out of the utter stillness meant nothing to her. She saw a flock of pigeons rise above the roofs of the more distant of the houses, circle, swerve and disappear beyond the cottonwoods. She noted that Ignacio was no longer leaning lazily against the wall; that he had stiffened, that his mouth was a little open, breathless, his attitude that of one listening expectantly, his eyes squinting as they had been just now when he fronted the sun.

Then came the second sound, a repetition of the first, sharp, in some way sinister. Then another and another and another until she lost count; a man's voice crying out strangely, muffled, indistinct, seeming to come from afar.

It was an incongruous, almost a humorous thing to see the sun-warmed passivity of Ignacio Chavez metamorphosed in a flash into activity. He had muttered something, had leaped away from the mission wall, dashed through the tangle of the garden and raced like a madman to the eastern arch. With both hands he grasped the dangling bell ropes, with all of his might he had set them clanging and shouting and clamoring until the reverberation smote her ears and set the blood strangely tingling through her. She had seen the look upon his face.

Suddenly she knew that those little sharp sounds had been the rattle of pistol shots. She sprang to her feet, her eyes widening, her cheeks growing pale. Now all was quiet save for the boom and roar of the bells. The pigeons were circling high in the clear sky, were coming back. She went quickly the way Ignacio had gone, calling out to him——

"What is it?"

He seemed all unmoved now as he made his bells cry out for him; it was for him to be calm while they trembled with the event which surely they must understand.

"It is a man dead," he told her, as his right hand called upon the Captain for a volume of sound from his bronze throat. "You will see. And there will be more work for Roderico Nortone!" He sighed and shook his head and for a moment spoke softly with his jangling bells. "And some day," he continued quietly, "it will be Roderico's time, *no?* And I will ring the bells for him and the Captain and the Dancer and Lolita, they will all put tears into men's eyes. But first, Santa Maria, let it be that I ring the others for him when he marries himself with the banker's daughter."

"A man dead?" the girl repeated, unwilling to grasp fully.

"You will see," returned Ignacio.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL in the old mission garden stood staring at Ignacio Chavez a long time, seeming compelled by a force greater than her own to watch him tugging and jerking at his bells. Plainly enough she understood that this was an alarm being sounded; a man dead through violence and the bell-ringer stirring the town with it. But when presently he let two of the ropes slip out of his hands and began a slow, mournful tolling of the Captain alone, she shuddered a little and withdrew.

That it might be merely a case of a man wounded, even badly wounded, did not once suggest itself to her. Ignacio had spoken as one who knew, in full confidence and with finality. She should see! She went back to the little bench which one day was to be a bright green and sat down. She could see that again the pigeons were circling excitedly; that from the baking street little puffs of dust arose to hang idly in the still air as though they were painted upon the clear canvas of the sky. She heard the voices of men, faint quick sounds against the tolling of the bell. Then suddenly all was very still once more; Ignacio had allowed the Captain to resume his silent brooding, and came to her.

"I must go to see who it is," he apologized. "Then I will know better how to ring for him. The sheepman from Las Palmas, I bet you. For did I not see when just now I passed the Casa Blanca that he was a little drunk with Señor Galloway's whisky? And does not every one know he sold many sheep and that means much money these days? *Sí, señorita;* it will be the sheepman from Las Palmas."

He was gone, slouching along again and in no haste now that he had fulfilled his first duty. What haste could there possibly be since, sheepman from Las Palmas or another, he was dead and therefore must wait upon Ignacio Chavez's pleasure? Somehow she gleaned this thought from his manner and therefore did not speak as she watched him depart.

That portion of the street which she could see from where she sat was empty, the dust settling, thinning, disappearing. Further down toward the Casa Blanca she could imagine the little knots of men asking one another what had happened and how; the chief actor in this fragment of human drama she could picture lying inert, uncaring that it was for him that a bell had tolled and would toll again, that men congregated curiously.

In a little while Ignacio would return, shuffling, smoking a dangling cigaret, his hat cocked against the sun; he would give her full particulars and then return to his bell.

She had come to San Juan to make a home here, to become a part of it, to make it a portion of her. To arrive upon a day like this was no pleasant omen; it was too dreadfully like taking a room in a house only to hear the life rattling out of a man beyond a partition. She was suddenly averse to hearing Ignacio's details; there came a quick desire to set her back to the town whose silence on the heels of uproar crushed her.

Rising hastily she went with quick steps down the weed-bordered walk, out at the broken gate and turned toward the mountains. One glance down the street as she crossed it showed her what she had expected; a knot of men at the door of the Casa Blanca, another small group at a window, evidently taking stock of a broken window-pane.

The sun, angry and red, was hanging low over a distant line of hills, the face of the flat lands were already drawing about them a thin faintly colorful haze. She had put on her hat and, like Ignacio, had set it a little to the side of her head, feeling her cheeks burning when the direct rays found them. The fine, loose soil was sifting into her low slippers before she had gone a score of paces. When she came back she would unpack her trunk and get out a sensible pair of boots. No doubt she was dressed ridiculously, but then the heat had tempted her.

A curious matter presented itself to her: in the little groups upon the street she had not seen a single woman. Were there none in San Juan? Was this some strange, altogether masculine community which she had stumbled into? Then she remembered how the bell-ringer had mentioned Mrs. Engle, the banker's wife, and his daughter and Mrs. Struve and others. Besides all this she had a letter to Mrs. Engle which she was going to present this evening.

She was thinking of anything in the world but of a tragedy not yet grown cold, so near her that for a little it had seemed to embrace her. Now it was almost as though it had not occurred. The world was all unchanged about her, the town somnolent. She had shuddered as Ignacio played upon his bell; but the shudder was rather from the bell's resonant eloquence than from any more vital cause.

A man she had never seen, whose name even she did not know, had been shot by another man unknown to her; she had heard only the shots; she had seen nothing. True, she had heard also a voice crying out, but she sensed that it had been the voice of an onlooker. She felt ashamed that the episode did not move her more.

As, earlier in the afternoon, she had been drawn from the heat of her room at Struve's hotel by the shade to be found in the mission garden, so now did a long, wavering line of cottonwoods beckon to her. In files which turned eastward or westward here and there only to come back to the general northerly trend, they indicated where an arroyo writhed down, tortured-serpent-wise, from the mountains. Through their foliage she had glimpsed the Engle home. She expected to find running water under their shade, that and an attendant coolness.

But the arroyo proved to be dry and hot, a gap in the dry bosom of the earth, its bottom strewn with smooth pebbles and sand and a very sparse, unattractive vegetation, stunted and harsh. And it was almost as hot here as on San Juan's street; into the shade crept the heat waves of the dry, scorched air.

Led by the line of cottonwoods, seeking action rather than coolness yet craving both, she found a little path and followed it, experiencing a vague relief to have the little town at her back. She knew that distances deceived the eye in this bleak land, and yet she thought that before dark she could reach the hills, idle there where perhaps there were a few languid flowers and pools, returning just tired enough to eat and go to sleep. She rather thought that she would postpone her call on the Engles until tomorrow.

"It's mañana-land, after all," she told herself, with a quick smile.

Half an hour later she found a spot where the trees stood in a denser growth, looking greener, more vigorous—less thirsty. She could fancy the great roots, questing far downward through the layers of dry soil, thrusting themselves almost with a human, passionate eagerness into the water they had found. Here she threw herself down, lying upon her back, gazing up through the branches and leaves.

Never until now had she known the meaning of utter stillness. She saw a bird, a poor brown unkempt little being; it had no song to offer the silence and in a little while flew away listlessly. She had seen a rabbit, a big gaunt uncomely wretch of a thing, disappearing silently among the clumps of brush.

Her spirit, essentially bright and happy, had striven hard with a new form of weariness all day. Not only was she coming into another land than that which she knew and understood; she was entering another phase of her life. She had chosen voluntarily, without device or suggestion; she had had her reasons and they had seemed sufficient, they were still sufficient. She had chosen wisely; she held to that, her judgment untroubled.

But that stubbornly recurrent sense that with the old landmarks she had abandoned the old life; that both in physical fact and in spiritual and mental actuality she was at the threshold of an unguessed, essentially different life, was disquieting. There is no getting away from an old basic truth that a man's life is so strongly influenced as almost to be molded by his environment; there was uneasiness in the thought that here one's existence might grow to resemble his habitat, taking on the gray tone and monotony and bleak barrenness of this sun-smitten land.

Yielding a little already to the command laid upon breathing nature hereabouts she was lying still, her hands lax, her thoughts taking unto themselves something of the character of the listless, songless brown bird's flight. She had come here today following in the footsteps of other men and a few women. Her own selection of San Juan was explicable; the thing to wonder at was what had given the hardihood to the first men to stop here and make houses and then homes?

Later she would know; the one magic word of the desert lands: water. For San Juan, standing midway between the railroad and the more tempting lands beyond the mountains, had found birth here because there was a mudhole for cradle; down under the sand were fortuitous layers of impervious clay cupping to hold much sweet water.

THE SLOW tolling of a bell came billowing out through the silence. The girl sat up. It was the Captain. Never, it seemed to her, had she heard anything so mournful. Ignacio had informed himself concerning all details and had returned to the garden at the mission. The man was dead, then. There could be no doubt as one listened to the measured sorrowing of the big bell.

She got to her feet and walking swiftly moved on, still further away from San Juan. The act was without premeditation; her whole being was insistent upon it. She wondered if it was the sheepman from Las Palmas; if he had, perhaps, a wife and children. Then she stopped suddenly; a new thought had come to her. Strange, inexplicable even, it had not suggested itself before.

She wondered who the other man was, the man who had done the killing. And what had happened to him? Had he fled? Had other men grappled with him, disarmed him, made of him a prisoner to answer for what he had done? What had been his motive, what passion had actuated him? Surely not just the greed for gold which the bell-ringer had suggested! What sort of a creature was he who, in cold, calculating blood could murder a man for a handful of money?

There was nothing to answer unless she could catch the thought of Ignacio Chavez in the ringing of his bell. She moved on again, hurrying.

Following the arroyo she had come to the first of the little, smooth hills, the lomas as the men on the stage had named them. Through them the dry watercourse wriggled, carrying its green pennons along its marge. She went up gentle slopes mantled with bleached grass which under her eyes was white in the glare of the sun. But the sun was very low now, very fierce and red, an angry god going down in temporary defeat but defiant to the last, filled with threat for tomorrow.

The far western uplands cut the great disc squarely in two; down slipped the half-wafer until it seemed that just a bright signal-fire was kindled upon the ridge. And as that faded from her eyes the slow sobbing of the swinging bell was like a wail for the death of the day.

She had removed her hat, fancying that already the earth was throwing off its heat, that a little coolness and freshness was coming down to meet her from the mountains. She turned her eyes toward them and then, just after the sunset, it was that she saw a man riding toward her. He was still far off when she first glimpsed him, half or three-quarters of a mile, just cresting one of the higher hills so that for him the sun had not yet set. For she caught the glint of light flaming back from the silver chasings of his bridle and from the barrel of the gun across the hollow of his left arm. She did not believe that he had seen her in the shadow of the cottonwoods.

If she went on she must meet him presently. She glanced back over her shoulder, noting how far she had come from the town. It was very still again; the bell had ceased its complaint; the hoofs of the approaching horse seemed shod with felt, falling upon felt. She swung about and walked back toward San Juan.

A little later she heard the man's voice, calling. Clearly to her since there was no one else. Why should he call to her? She gave no sign of having heard but walked on a trifle faster. She sensed that he was galloping down upon her; sensed merely for still in the loose sand the hoofbeats were muffled. Then he called again and she stopped and turned and waited.

A splendid big fellow he was, she noted as he came on, riding a splendid big horse. Man and beast seemed to belong to the desert; had it not been for the glint of the sun she realized now she would probably not have distinguished their distant forms from the land across which they had moved. The horse was a darkish, dull gray; the man, boots, corduroy breeches, soft shirt and hat, was garbed in gray or so covered with the dust of travel as to seem so.

"What in the world are you doing way out here?" he called to her. And then having come closer he reined in his horse, stared at her a moment in surprised wonderment, swept off his hat and said, a shade awkwardly: "I beg pardon. I thought you were some one else."

For her wide hat was again drooping about her face and he had had just the form of her and the white skirt and waist to judge by.

"It is all right," she said lightly. "I imagined that you had made a mistake."

It was something of a victory over herself to have succeeded in speaking thus carelessly. For there had been the impulse, a temptation almost, just to stare back at the man as he had stared at her and in silence. Not only was the type physically magnificent; to her it was, like everything about her, new. And that which had held her at first was his eyes.

For it is not the part of youth to be stern-eyed; and while this man could not be more than midway between twenty and thirty, his eyes had already acquired the trick of being hard, steely, suggesting relentlessness, stern and quick. Tall, lean-bodied, with big calloused hands, as brown as an Indian, hair and eyes were uncompromisingly black. He belonged to the Southwestern wastes.

These things she noted, and that his face looked drawn and weary, that about his left hand was tied a handkerchief, hinting at a minor cut, that his horse looked as travel-worn as himself.

"One doesn't see strangers often around San Juan," he explained. "As for a girl—well, I never made a mistake like this before. I'll have to look out."

The muscles of the tired face softened a little, into his eyes came a quick light that was good to see, for an instant masking their habitual sternness.

"If you'll excuse me again, and if you don't know a whole lot about this country—" he paused to measure her sweepingly, seemed satisfied and concluded—"I wouldn't go out all alone like this; especially after sundown. We're a rather tough lot, you know. Good-by."

He had lifted his hat again, loosened his horse's reins and passed by her. Just as she had expected, just as she had desired. And yet, with his dusty back turned upon her she experienced a sudden return of her loneliness. Would she ever look into the eyes of a friend again? Could she ever actually accomplish what she had set out to accomplish; make San Juan a home?

Her eyes followed him, frankly admiring now; so she might have looked at any other of nature's triumphant creations. Then, before he had gone a score of yards, she saw how a little tightening of his horse's reins had brought the big brute down from a swinging gallop to a dead standstill. The bell was tolling again.

Again he was calling to her, again, swinging about, he had ridden to her side. And his voice now, like his eyes, was ominously stern.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she told him, marvelling at the look on his face. His emotion was purely one of anger, mounting anger that a man was dead! "The man who rings the bells told me that he thought it must be a sheepman from Las Palmas. He went to see—I didn't wait."

Nor did this man wait now. Again he had wheeled; now he was racing along the arroyo, urging a tired horse that he might lose no unnecessary handful of moments. And as he went she heard him curse savagely under his breath and knew that he had forgotten her in the thoughts which had been released by the dull booming of a bell.

CHAPTER III

IN THE bar at the Casa Blanca, a long wide room, low-ceilinged and with cool, sprinkled floor a score or more men had congregated. For the most part they were silent, content to look at the signs left by the recent shooting and to have what scraps of explanation were vouchsafed them. And these were meager enough. The man who had done the shooting was sullen and self-contained. The dead man—it was the sheepman from Las Palmas—lay in an adjoining card-room, stark under the blanket which the large hands of Jim Galloway had drawn over him.

When the clatter of hoofs rang out in the street a couple of men went to the door.

"It is the sheriff," they said, "coming back."

Roderick Norton entering swiftly, his spurs dragging and jangling, swept the faces in the room with eyes which had in them none of that human glint of good-will which the girl at the arroyo had glimpsed in them. Again they were steely, angry, bespeaking both threat and suspicion.

"Who is it this time?" he demanded, sharply.

"Bisbee, from Las Palmas," they told him.

"Who did it?" came the quick question. And then, before an answer could come, his voice ringing with the anger in it—"Antone or 'Kid' Rickard? Which one?"

He had shifted his rifle so that it was caught up under his left arm. His right hand, frank and unhidden, rested upon the butt of the heavy-caliber revolver sagging from his belt. Standing just within the room he had stepped to one side of the doorway so that the wall was at his back.

"It was the Kid," some one answered. And was continuing, "He says it was self-defense——"

Norton cut in bluntly——

"Was Galloway here when it happened?"

"Yes."

"Where's Galloway now?"

It was noteworthy that he asked for Jim Galloway rather than for Kid Rickard.

"In there," they told him, indicating a second card-room adjoining that in which the Las Palmas sheepman lay. Rod Norton, again glancing sharply across the faces confronting him, went to the closed door and set his hand to the knob. But Jim Galloway having desired privacy just now had locked the door. Norton struck it sharply, commanding:

"Open up, Galloway. It's Norton."

There came the low mutter of a voice hasty and with the quality of stern exhortation, the snap of the lock and the door was jerked open. Norton's eyes, probing into every square foot of the chamber, took stock of Jim Galloway and beyond him of Kid Rickard, slouching forward in a chair and rolling a cigaret.

"Hello, Norton," said Galloway, tonelessly. "Glad you showed up. There's been trouble."

A heavy man above the waist-line, thick-shouldered with large head and bull throat, his muscular torso tapered down to clean-lined hips, his legs of no greater girth than those of the lean-bodied man confronting him, his feet small in glove-fitting boots. His eyes, prominent and full and a clear brown, were a shade too innocent. Chin, jaw and mouth, the latter full-lipped, were those of strength, smashing power and a natural cruelty. He was the one man to be found in San Juan who was dressed as the rather fastidiously inclined business men dress in the cities.

"Another man down, Galloway," said Norton, with an ominous sternness. "And in your place. How long do you think that you can keep out from under?"

His meaning was plain enough; the men behind him in the barroom listened in attitudes which, varying in other matters, were alike in their tenseness. Galloway however, staring stonily with eyes not unlike polished agate so cold and steady were they, gave no sign of taking offense.

"You and I never were friends, Rod Norton," he said, unmoved. "Still that's no reason you should jump me for trouble. Answering your question, I expect to keep out from under just as long as two things remain as they are: first, as long as I play the game square and in the open; next, as long as an overgrown boy holds down the job of sheriff in San Juan."

In Norton's eyes was blazing hatred, in Galloway's mere steady, unwinking boldness.

"You saw the killing?" the sheriff asked, curtly.

"Yes," said Galloway.

"The Kid there did it?"

For the first time the man slouching forward in the chair lifted his head. Had a stranger looked in at that moment, curious to see him who has just committed homicide—or murder—he must have experienced a positive shock. Sullen-eyed, sullen-lipped, the man-killer could not yet have seen the last of his teens. A thin wisp of straw-colored hair across a low, atavistic forehead, unhealthy, yellowish skin, with pale, lack-luster, faded blue eyes, he looked evil and vicious and cruel.

One looking from him to Jim Galloway would have suspected that one could be as inhuman as the other but with the difference that that which was but means to an end with Galloway would be end in itself to Kid Rickard. Something of the primal savage shone in the pale fires of his eyes.

"Yes," retorted the Kid, his surly voice little better than a snarl. "I got him and be damned to him!"

"Bad luck cursing a dead man, Rickard," said Norton, coldly. "What did you kill him for?"

Kid Rickard's tongue ran back and forth between his colorless lips before he replied.

"He tried to get me first," he said, defiantly.

"Who saw the shooting?"

"Jim Galloway. And Antone."

Rod Norton grunted his disgust with the situation.

"Give me your gun," he commanded, tersely.

THE KID frowned. Galloway cleared his throat. Rickard's eyes went to him swiftly. Then he got to his feet, jerked a thirty-eight caliber revolver from the hip-pocket of his overalls and held it out, surrendering it reluctantly. Norton "broke" it, ejecting the cartridges into his palm. Not an empty shell among them; the Kid had slipped in a fresh shell for every exploded one.

"How many times did you shoot?"

"I don't know. Two or three, I guess. —— it, do you imagine a man counts 'em?"

"What were you and Galloway doing alone in here with the door locked?"

Galloway cut in sharply——

"I didn't want any more trouble; I was afraid somebody——"

"Shut up, will you?" cried the sheriff fiercely. "I'll give you all the chance to talk you want pretty soon. Answer me, Rickard."

"I told him to lock me up somewhere until you or Tom Cutter come," said the Kid, slowly. "I was afraid somebody might jump me for what I done. I didn't want no more trouble."

Norton turned briefly to the crowded room behind him.

"Anybody know where Cutter is?" he asked.

It appeared that every one knew. Tom Cutter, Rod Norton's deputy, had gone in the early morning to Mesa Verde, and would probably return in the cool of the evening. Frowning, Norton made the best of the situation and to gain his purpose called four men out of the crowd.

"I want you boys to do me a favor," he said. "Antone, come here."

The short, squat half-breed standing behind the bar lifted his heavy black brows, demanding:

"*Y porque?* What am I to do?"

"As you are told," Norton snapped at him. "Benny, you and Dick walk down the street with Antone; you other boys walk down the other way with Rickard. If they haven't had all the chance to talk together already that they want don't give them any more opportunity. Step up, Rickard."

The Kid sulked but under the look the sheriff turned on him he came forward and went out of the door, his whole attitude remaining one of defiance. Antone, his swart face as expressionless as a piece of mahogany, hesitated, glanced at Galloway, shrugged and did as Rickard had done, going out between his two guards. The men remaining in the barroom were watching their sheriff expectantly. He swung about upon Galloway.

"Now," he said quickly, "who fired the first shot, Galloway?"

Galloway smiled, went to his bar, poured himself a glass of whisky and standing there, the glass twisting slowly in his fingers, stared back innocently at his interrogator.

"Trying the case already, Judge Norton?" he inquired equably.

"Will you answer?" Norton said coolly.

"Sure." Galloway kept his look steady upon the sheriff's and into the innocence of his eyes there came a veiled insolence. "Bisbee shot first."

"Where was he standing?"

Galloway pointed.

"Right there."

The spot indicated was about three or four feet from where Norton stood, near the second card-room door.

"Where was the Kid?"

"Over there." Again Galloway pointed. "Clean across the room, over by where the chair is tumbled over against the table."

"How many times did Bisbee shoot?"

Galloway seemed to be trying to remember. He drank his whisky slowly, reached over the bar for a cigar upon the shelf under it, and answered:

"Twice or three times."

"How many times did Rickard shoot?"

"I'm not sure. I'd say about the same; two or three times."

"Where was Antone standing?"

"Behind the bar; down at the far end, nearest the door."

"Where were you?"

"Leaning against the bar, talking to Antone."

"What were you talking about?"

This question came quicker, sharper than the others, as though calculated to startle Galloway into a quick answer. But the proprietor of the Casa Blanca was lighting his cigar and took his time. When he looked up his eyes told Norton that he had understood any danger which might lie under a question so simple in the seeming. His eyes were smiling contemptuously, but there was a faint flush in his cheeks.

"I don't remember," he replied at last. "Some trifle. The shooting, coming suddenly that way——"

"What started the ruction?"

"Bisbee had been drinking a little. He seemed to be in the devil's own temper. He had asked the Kid to have a drink with him and Rickard refused. He had his drink alone and then invited the Kid again. Rickard told him to go to hell. Bisbee started to walk across the room as though he was going to the card-room. Then he grabbed his gun and whirled around and started shooting."

"Missing every time, of course?"

Galloway nodded.

"You'll remember I said he was carrying enough of a load to make his aim bad."

Norton asked half a dozen further questions and then said abruptly:

"That's all. As you go out will you tell the boys to send Antone in?"

Again a hint of color crept slowly, dully into Galloway's cheeks.

"You're going pretty far, Rod Norton," he said, tonelessly.

"You're —— right I am!" cried Norton, ringingly. "And I am going a lot further, Jim Galloway, before I get through and you can bet all of your blue chips on it. I want Antone in here and I want you outside! Do I get what I want or not?"

Galloway stood motionless, his cigar clamped tight in his big square teeth. Then he shrugged and went to the door.

"If I am standing a good deal off of you," he muttered, hanging on his heel just before he passed out, "it's because I am as strong as any man in the county to see the law brought into San Juan. And," for the first time yielding outwardly to a display of the emotion riding him, he spat out venomously and tauntingly, "and we'd have had the law here long ago had we had a couple of men in the boots of the Nortons, father and son!"

Rod Norton's face went a flaming red with anger, his hand grew white upon the butt of the gun at his side.

"Some day, Jim Galloway," he said steadily, "I'll get you just as sure as you got Billy Norton!"

Galloway laughed and went out.

TO ANTONE Norton put the identical questions he had asked of Galloway, receiving virtually the same replies. Seeking the one opportunity suggesting itself into tricking the bartender he asked at the end.

"Just before the shooting, when you and Galloway were talking and he told you that Bisbee was looking for trouble, why weren't you ready to grab him when he went for his gun?"

Antone was giving his replies as guardedly as Galloway had done. He took his time now.

"Because," he began finally, "I do not belief when Señor Galloway speak that——"

His eyes had been roving from Norton's, going here and there about the room. Suddenly a startled look came into them and he snapped his mouth shut.

"Go on," prompted the sheriff.

"I don't remember," grunted Antone. "I forget what Señor Galloway say, what I say. Bisbee say, 'Have a drink.' The Kid say, 'Go to hell.' Bisbee shoot, one, two, three, like that. I forget what we talk about."

Norton turned slowly and looked whither Antone had been looking when he cut his own words off so sharply. The man upon whom his eyes rested longest was a creased-face Mexican, Vidal Nunez, who stood head-down now making a cigaret.

"That's all, Antone," Norton said. "Send the Kid in."

The Kid came, still sullen but swaggering a little, his hat cocked jauntily to one side, the yellow wisp of hair in his faded eyes. And he, in turn questioned, gave such answers as the two had given before him.

For the first time now the sheriff, stepping across the room, looked for such evidence as flying lead might have left for him. In the wall just behind the spot where Bisbee had stood were two bullet-holes. Going to the far end of the room where the chair leaned against the table, he found that a pane of glass in the window opening upon the street had been broken. There were no bullet-marks upon wall or woodwork.

"Bisbee shot two or three times did he?" he cried, wheeling on the Kid. "And missed every time? And all the bullets went through the one hole in the window, I suppose?"

The Kid shrugged insolently.

"I didn't watch 'em," he returned, briefly.

Galloway and Antone were allowed to come again into the room and of Galloway, quite as though no hot word had passed between them, Norton asked quietly:

"Bisbee had a lot of money on him. What happened to it?"

"In there." Galloway nodded toward the card-room whose door had remained closed. "In his pocket."

A few of the morbid followed as he went into the little room. Most of the men had already seen and had no further curiosity. Norton drew the blanket away, noted the wounds, three of them, two at the base of the throat and one just above the left eye. Then, going through the sheepman's pockets, he brought out a handful of coins. A few gold, most of them silver dollars and half-dollars, in all a little over fifty dollars.

The dead man lay across two tables drawn up together, his booted feet sticking out stolidly beyond the bed, still too short to accommodate his length of body. Norton's eyes rested on the man's boots longer than upon the cold face. Then, stepping back to the door so that all in the barroom might catch the significance of his words he said sharply:

"How many men of you know where Bisbee always carried his money when he was on his way to bank?"

"In his boots!" answered two voices together.

"Come this way, boys. Take a look at his boots, will you?"

And as they crowded about the table, sensing some new development, Galloway pushing well to the fore, Norton's vibrant voice rang out:

"It was a clean job getting him, and a clean job telling the story of how it happened. But there wasn't over much time and in the rush—tell me, Jim Galloway, how does it happen that the right boot is on the left foot!"

CHAPTER IV

ROD NORTON made no arrest. Leaving the card-room abruptly he signaled to Julius Struve, the heavy-featured hotel-keeper, to follow him. In the morning Struve, in his official capacity as coroner, would demand a verdict. Having long been in strong sympathy with the sheriff he was to be looked to now for a frank prediction of the inquest's result. And, very thoughtful about it all, he gravely agreed with Norton; the coroner's jury, taking the evidence offered by Jim Galloway, Kid Rickard and Antone, would bring in a verdict of justifiable homicide.

"Later on we'll get 'em, Roddy—mebbe," he said finally. "But not now. If you pulled the Kid it would just be runnin' up the county expense an' all for nothin'."

The sheriff left him in silence and leading his horse went the few steps to the hotel. Ignacio Chavez appearing opportunely, Norton gave his animal into the breed's custody; Ignacio, accustomed to doing odd jobs for el Señor Roderico Nortone, and to the occasional half-dollars resulting from such transactions, led the big gray away while the sheriff entered the hotel. It had been a day of hard riding and scanty meals and he was hungry.

Bright and new and conspicuous, a little gold-lettered sign at Struve's doorway caught his eye and caused him to remember the wounded left hand which had been paining him considerably through the long hot day. The sign bore the name of Dr. V. D. Page with the words "Physician and Surgeon"; in blue pencilled letters upon the practitioner's card, affixed to the brass chain suspending the sign, were the further words——

Room 5, Struve's Hotel.

The sheriff went through the empty dining-room where he left his rifle standing in a corner, washed his face and hands in a basin on the back porch, removing the handkerchief from his left hand, and, looking in upon the Indian cook to say that he would be ready to eat in five minutes, went to Room 5. It was at the front of the building, upon the ground floor, and opened almost immediately when he rapped. Confronting him, her own hands just being dried upon a small linen towel, was the girl he had encountered at the arroyo. He lifted his hat to her, looked beyond her and said simply:

"I was looking for Dr. Page. Is he in now?"

"Yes," she told him gravely. "Come in, please."

He stepped across the threshold, his eyes trained to quick observation of details taking in all there was to be seen at a glance. The room showed all signs of a fresh unpacking, the one table and two chairs piled high with odds and ends. For the most part the miscellany consisted of big, fat books, bundles of towels and fresh white napkins, stoppered bottles of varicolored contents and black leather cases, no doubt containing a surgeon's instruments. Through an open door giving entrance to the adjoining room he noted further signs of unpacking with a marked difference in the character of the litter; the girl stepped quickly to this door, shutting out the vision of a helter-skelter of feminine apparel.

"It is your hand?" she asked, as in most thoroughly matter-of-fact fashion she put out her own for it. "Let me see it."

But for a moment he bestowed upon her merely a slow look of question.

"You don't mean that you are Dr. Page?" he asked. Then, believing that he understood— "You're the nurse?"

"Is a physician's life likely to be so filled with his duties that he must bring a nurse with him to San Juan?" she countered. "Yes, I am Dr. Page."

He noted that she was as defiant about the matter as the Kid had been about the killing of Bisbee of Las Palmas; plainly she had foreseen that the type of man animal inhabiting this corner of the out-of-the-way world would be likely to wonder at her hardihood and, perhaps, to jeer.

"I just got here today," she explained in the same matter-of-fact way. "Consequently you will pardon the looks of things. But I am one of the kind that believes in hanging out a shingle first, getting details arranged next. Now may I see the hand?"

"It's hardly anything." He lifted it now, holding it out in front of him. "Just a little cut, you know. But it's showing signs of infection. A little antiseptic——"

She had already taken his fingers into hers, was bending over the wound. He noted two things, now: what strong hands she had, shapely, with sensitive fingers all ignorant of rings; how richly alive and warmly colored her hair was, full of little waves and curls.

She had nothing to say while she treated him. Over an alcohol lamp she heated some water; in a bowl, brought from the adjoining room, she cleansed the hand thoroughly. Then the application of the final antiseptic, a bit of absorbent cotton, a winding of surgeon's tape about a bit of gauze, and the thing was done. Only at the end did she say—

"It's a peculiar cut—not a knife-cut, is it?"

"No," he answered humorously. "Did it on a piece of lead. How much is it, Doctor?"

"Two dollars," she told him, again busied with the drying of her own hands. "Better let me look at it again in the morning if it pains you any."

He laid two silver dollars in her palm, hesitated a moment and then went out.

"She's got the nerve," was his thoughtful estimate as he went to his corner table in the dining-room. "But I don't believe she is going to last long in San Juan. Funny she should come to a place like this, anyhow. Wonder what the V stands for?"

At any rate the hand had been skilfully treated and bandaged; he nodded at it approvingly. Then, with his meal set before him, he divided his thoughts pretty evenly between it and the recent shooting at the Casa Blanca. The sense was strong upon him as it had been many a time before that before very long either Rod Norton or Jim Galloway would lie as the sheepman from Las Palmas was lying, while the other might watch his sunrises and sunsets with a strange, new emotion of security.

The sheriff, manifesting an appetite which gave color to the suspicion that he had not eaten for a matter of twelve hours, was beginning his meal when the newest stranger in San Juan came into the dining-room. She had had time to finish bathing her hands and face, had arranged her lustrous copper-brown hair becomingly, and looked fresh and cool and pretty. Norton approved of her with his keen eyes while he watched her go to her place at a table across the room. As she sat down, giving no sign of having noted him, her back toward him, he continued to observe and to admire her lithe, perfect figure and the strong, sensitive hands busied with her napkin.

A slovenly, half-grown Indian girl, Anita, the cook's daughter, came in from the kitchen, directed the slumbrous eyes of her race upon the sheriff who fitted well in a woman's eye, and went to serve the single other late diner. Now Norton caught a fleeting view of V. D. Page's throat and cheek as she turned slightly in speaking with Anita. The serving-maid withdrew and as she went out Norton rose to his feet and crossed the room to the far table.

"May I bring my things over and eat with you?" he asked when he stood looking down on her and she had lifted her eyes curiously to his. "If you've come to stay you can't go on forever not knowing anybody here, you know. Since you've got to know us sooner or later why not begin to get acquainted? Here and now and with me? I'm Roderick Norton."

One must have had far less discernment than she not to have felt instinctively that the great bulk of human conventions would shrivel and vanish before they could cross this far across the desert lands. Besides the man standing over her looked straight and honestly into her eyes and for a little she glimpsed again the youth of him veiled by the sternness his life had set into his soul and upon his face.

"It is kind of you to have pity upon me in my isolation," she answered lightly and without hesitation. "And, to tell the truth, I never was so terribly lonesome in all my life."

He made two trips back and forth to bring his plate and coffee cup and auxiliary sauce dishes and plated silver while she wondered idly that he did not instruct the Indian girl to perform the service for him. Even then she half-formulated the thought that it was a much more natural thing for this man to do for himself what he wanted done than for him to sit down to be waited upon. A small matter, no doubt; but then mountains are made up of small particles and character of just such small characteristics as this.

DURING the half-hour which they spent together over their meal they got to know each other rather better than chance acquaintances are likely to do in so brief a time. For from the moment of Norton's coming over to her table the bars were fortuitously down between them. She was plainly eager to supplement Ignacio Chavez's information of *la gente* of San Juan and its surrounding country, evincing a curiosity which he readily understood to be based upon the necessities of her profession.

In return for all that he told her she sketchily spoke of her own plans, very vague plans, to be sure, she admitted with one of her quick, gay smiles. She had come prepared to accept what she found; she was playing no game of hide and seek with her destiny, but had come out thus far from the former limits of her existence to meet life half-way, hoping to do good for others, a little imperiously determined to achieve her own measure of success and happiness.

From the beginning each was ready, perhaps more than ready, to like the other. Her eyes, whether they smiled or grew suddenly grave, pleased him; always were they fearless. He sensed that beneath the external soft beauty of a very lovely young woman there was a spirit of hardihood in every sense worthy of the success which she had come out bare-handed to make for herself, and in the estimation of Rod Norton no quality stood higher than a superb independence.

On her part, there was first a definite surprise, then a glow of satisfaction that in this virile arm of the law there was nothing of the blusterer. She set him down as a quiet gentleman first, as a sheriff next. She enjoyed his low, good-humored laugh and laughed back with him, even while she experienced again the unaccustomed thrill at the sheer physical bigness of him, the essentially masculine strength of a hardy son of the Southwestern outdoors.

Not once had he referred to the affair at the Casa Blanca or to his part in it; not a question did she ask him concerning it. He told himself that so utterly human, so perfectly feminine a being as she must be burning with curiosity; she marvelled that he could think, speak of anything else. When they rose together from the table they were alike prepared, should circumstance so direct, to be friends.

She was going now to call upon the Engles. She had told him that she had a letter to Mrs. Engle from a common friend in Richmond.

"I don't want to appear to be riding too hard on your trail," he smiled at her. "But I was planning dropping in on the Engles myself this evening. They're friends of mine, you know."

She laughed and, as they left the hotel, propounded a riddle for him to answer: should Mr. Norton introduce her to Mrs. Engle so that she might present her letter, or, after the letter was presented, should Mrs. Engle introduce her to Mr. Norton?

It did not suggest itself to her until they had passed from the street, through the cottonwoods and into the splendid living-room of the Engle home, that her escort was not dressed as she had imagined all civilized mankind dressed for a call. Walking through the primitive town his boots and soft shirt and travel-soiled hat had been in too perfect keeping with the environment for her to be more than pleasurably conscious of them. At the Engle's, however, his garb struck her for a moment of the first shock of contrast, as almost grotesquely out of place.

At the broad front door Norton had rapped. The desultory striking of a piano's keys ceased abruptly, a girl's voice crying eagerly, "It's Roddy!" hinted at the identity of the listless player; a door within flung open flooded the broad entrance hall with light. And then the outer door framed banker Engle's daughter, fair-haired, fair-skinned, fluffy-skirted, her eyes bright with unhidden expectation, her two hands held out offering themselves in doubled greetings. But, having seen the unexpected guest at the sheriff's side, the bright-haired girl paused for a brief moment of uncertainty upon the threshold, her hands falling to her sides.

"Hello, Florrie," Norton was saying, quietly. "I have brought a caller for your mother. Miss Engle, Miss Page."

"How do you do, Miss Page?" Florrie replied, regaining her poise and giving one of her hands to each of the callers, the abandon of her first appearance gone in a flash to be replaced by a vague hint of stiffness. "Mama will be so glad to see you. Do come in."

She turned and led the way down the wide, deep hall and into the living-room, a chamber which boldly defied one to remember that he was still upon the rim of the desert. In one swift glance the newcomer to San Juan was offered a picture in which the tall, carelessly-clad form of the sheriff became incongruous; she wondered that he remained at his ease as he so obviously did.

Yonder was a grand piano, a silver-chased vase upon a wall bracket over it holding three long-stemmed, red roses; a heavy, massive-topped table strewn comfortably and invitingly with books and magazines; an exquisite rug and one painting upon the far wall, an original seascape suggestive of Waugh at his best; excellent, leather-upholstered chairs luxuriously inviting and at once homelike and rich. Just rising from one of these chairs drawn up to the table reading-lamp, a book still in his hand, was Mr. Engle, while Mrs. Engle, in lavender, as fair as her daughter, just beginning to grow stout, came forward smilingly.

"Back again, Roddy?"

She gave him a plump hand, patted his lean brown fingers after her motherly fashion, and came to where the girl had stopped just within the door.

"Virginia Page, aren't you? As if any one in the world would have to tell me who you were! You are your mother all over, child; did you know it? Oh, kiss me, kiss me, my dear, for your mother's sake, and save your handshakes for strangers."

Virginia, taken utterly by surprise as Mrs. Engle's arms closed warmly about her, grew rosy with pleasure; the dreary loneliness of a long day was wiped out with a kiss and a hug.

"I didn't know—" she began haltingly, only to be cut short by Mrs. Engle crying to her husband:

"It's Virginia Page, John. Wouldn't you have known her anywhere?"

John Engle, courteous, urbane, a pleasant-featured man with grave, kindly eyes and a rather large, firm-lipped mouth nodded to Norton and gave Virginia his hand cordially.

"I must be satisfied with a handshake, Miss Page," he said in a deep, pleasant voice, "but I refuse to be a mere stranger. We are immensely glad to have you with us. Mother, can't you see we have most thoroughly mystified her; swooping down upon her like this without giving her an inkling of how and why we expected her?"

Roderick Norton and Florrie Engle had drawn a little apart; Virginia, with her back to them during the greeting of Mrs. and Mr. Engle had no way of knowing whether the withdrawal had been by mutually spontaneous desire or whether the initiative had been the sheriff's or Miss Engle's. Not that it mattered or concerned her in any slightest particular. . . .

In her hand was the note of introduction she had brought from Mrs. Seth Morgan; evidently both its services and those of Roderick Norton might be dispensed with in the matter of her being presented.

"Of course," Mrs. Engle was saying. An arm about the girl's slim waist, she drew her to a big leather couch and, still holding her hand, sat down beside her. "Marian never does things by halves, my dear; you know that, don't you? That's a letter she gave you for me? Well, she wrote me another, so I know all about you. And, if you are willing to accept the relationship with out-of-the-world folks, we're sort of cousins!"

Virginia Page flushed vividly. She had known all along that her mother had been a distant relative of Mrs. Engle, but she had had no desire, no thought even, of employing the very faint tie as a sort of insistent argument for being accepted by the banker's family. She did not care to come here like the proverbial poor relation.

"You are very kind," she said quietly, her lips smiling while her eyes were grave. "But I don't want you to feel that I have been building on the fact of kinship; I just wanted to be friends if you liked me, not because you felt it your duty——"

Engle, who had come dragging his chair after him, to join them, laughed amusedly.

"Answering your question, Mrs. Engle," he chuckled, "I'd certainly know her for Virginia Page! When we come to know her better maybe she will allow us to call her Cousin Virginia? In the meantime, to play safe, I suppose that to us she'd better be just Doctor Page?"

"John is as full of nonsense after banking hours," explained Mrs. Engle, still affectionately patting Virginia's hand, "as he is crammed with business from nine until four. Which makes life with him possible; it's like having two husbands, makes for variety and so saves me from flirting with other men. Now, tell us all about yourself."

Virginia, who had been a little stiff-muscled until now, leaned back among the cushions unconscious of a half-sigh of content and of her relaxation. During the long day San Juan had sought to frighten, to repel her. Now it was making ample amends. First the companionable society of Rod Norton, then the simple, hearty welcome here. She returned the pressure of Mrs. Engle's soft, warm hands in sheer gratitude.

AFTER THAT they chatted lightly, Engle gradually withdrawing from the conversation and secretly watching the girl keenly, studying her play of expression, seeking according to his habit to make his guarded estimate of a new factor in his household. From Virginia's face his eyes went swiftly now and then to his daughter's, animated in her tête-à-tête with the sheriff. Once, when Virginia turned unexpectedly, she caught the hint of a troubled frown in his eyes.

Broad double doors in the west wall of the living-room gave entrance to the patio. The doors were open now to the slowly freshening night air and from where she sat Virginia Page had a glimpse of a charming court, an orange-tree heavy with fruit and blossom, red and yellow roses, a sleeping fountain whose still water reflected starshine and the lamp in its niche under a grape-vine arbor. When Norton and Florence Engle strolled out into the inviting patio Engle, breaking his silence, leaned forward and dominated the conversation.

Virginia had been doing the major part of the talking, answering questions about Mrs. Engle's girlhood home, telling something of herself. Now John Engle, reminding his wife that their guest must be consumed with curiosity about her new environment, sought to interest her in this and that in and about San Juan.

"There was a killing this afternoon," he admitted, quietly. "No doubt you know of it and have been shocked by it, and perhaps on account of it have a little misjudged San Juan. We are not all cutthroats here, by any manner of means; I think I might almost say that the rough element is in the minority. We are in a state of transition, like all other frontier settlements. The railroad, though it doesn't come closer than the little tank station where you took the stage this morning, has touched our lives out here.

"A railroad brings civilizing influences; but the first thing it does is to bring in a surging tide of forces contending against law and order. Pioneers," and he smiled his slow, grave, tolerant smile, "are as often as not tumultuous-blooded and self-sufficient and prone to kick over the established traces. We've got that class to deal with now—and that boy, Rod Norton, with his job cut out for him, is getting results. He's the biggest man, not only in the county, but in this end of the State right now!"

Further to that he told her something of the sheriff. Young Norton, having returned from college some three years before to live the only life possible to one of his blood, had become manager of his father's ranch in and beyond the San Juan Mountains. At the time Billy Norton was the county sheriff and had his hands full. Rumor said that he had promised himself to "get" a certain man; Engle admitted that that man was Jim Galloway of the Casa Blanca. But either Galloway or a tool of Galloway or some other man had "gotten" Billy Norton, shooting him down in his own cabin and from the back, putting a shotgun charge of buckshot into his brain.

It had occurred shortly after Roderick Norton's return, shortly before the expiration of Billy Norton's term of office. Rod Norton, putting another man in his place on the ranch, had buried his father and then had asked of the county his election to the place made empty by his father's death. Though he was young, men believed in him. The election returns gave him his place by a crushing majority.

"And he has done good work," concluded Engle thoughtfully. "Because of what he has done, because he does not make an arrest until he has his evidence and then drives hard to a certain conviction, he has come to be called 'Dead-sure Norton' and has come to be respected everywhere and feared more than a little. Until now it has become virtually a two-man fight, Rod Norton against Jim Galloway."

"John," interposed Mrs. Engle, "aren't you giving Virginia rather a somber side of things?"

"Maybe I am," he agreed. "But this killing of the Las Palmas man in broad daylight has become pretty close to filling my mind. Who's going to be next?" His eyes went swiftly toward the patio, taking stock of the two figures there. Then he shrugged, went to the table for a cigar and returned smiling to inform Virginia of life on the desert and in the valleys beyond the mountains, of scattering attempts at reclamation and irrigation, of how one made towns of sun-dried mud, of where the adobe soil itself was found, drifted over with sand in the shade of the cottonwoods.

But Mrs. Engle's sigh, while her husband spoke of black mud and straw, testified that her thoughts had clung about those events and possibilities which she herself had asked him to avoid; her eyes wandered to the tall, rudely-garbed figure dimly seen in the patio. Virginia, recalling Jim Galloway as she had seen him on the stage, heavy-bodied, narrow-hipped, masterful alike in carriage and the look of the prominent eyes, glanced with Mrs. Engle toward Rod Norton.

He was laughing at something passing between him and Florence and for the moment appeared utterly boyish. Were it not for the grim reminder of the forty-five caliber revolver which the nature of his sworn duties did not allow of his laying aside even upon a night like this, it would have been easy to forget that he was all that which the one word "sheriff" connotes in a land like that about San Juan.

"Can't get away from it, can we?" Engle having caught the look in the two women's eyes broke off abruptly in what he was saying and now sat studying his cigar with frowning eyes. "Man against man, and the whole county knows it, one employing whatever criminal's tools slip into his hands, the other fighting fair and in the open. Man against man and in a death-grapple just because they are the men they are, with one backed up by a hang-dog crowd like Kid Rickard and Antone and the other playing virtually a lone hand. What's the end going to be?"

Virginia thought of Ignacio Chavez. He, had he been here, would have answered:

"In the end there will be the ringing of the bells for a man dead. You will see! Which one? *Quien sabe?* The bells will ring."

CHAPTER V

THROUGH the silence of the outer night, as though in truth Ignacio Chavez were speaking and in prophecy, came billowing the slow beating of the deep mourning bell. Mrs. Engle sighed; Engle frowned; Virginia for her part sat rigid, at once disturbed and oppressed.

"How can you stand that terrible bell?" she cried softly. "I should think that it would drive you mad! How long does he ring it?"

"Once every hour until midnight," answered Engle, his face once more placid as he withdrew his look from the patio and transferred it to his cigar. And then, with a half-smile: "There are many San Juans, Cousin Virginia; there is, in all the wide world, but one San Juan of the Bells! It is our distinctive mark; you would not take that from us? Now that you are to become of San Juan you must, like the rest of us, take a pride in San Juan's bells. Which you will do soon or late; perhaps just as soon as you come to know something of their separate and collective histories."

"Tell her, John," suggested Mrs. Engle, again obviously anxious to dispel the more lugubrious and tragic atmosphere of the evening with any chance talk which might offer itself.

"Let her wait until Ignacio can tell her," laughed Engle. "No one else can tell it so well, and certainly no one else has an equal pride or even an equal right in the matter."

But, though he refused to take up the colorful theme of the biographies of the Captain, the Dancer, Lolita and the rest, John Engle began to speak lightly upon an associated topic, first asking the girl if she knew with what ceremony these ancient bells had been cast; when she shook her head and while the slow throbbing beat of the Captain still insisted through the night's silences, he explained that doubtless all six of Ignacio Chavez's bells had taken form under the calm gaze of high priests of old Spain.

For legend had it that all six were from their beginnings destined for the new missions to be scattered broadcast throughout a new land, to ring out the Word of God to heathen ears. And bells meant for such high service were never cast without grave religious service and sacrifice.

Through the darkness of long dead centuries the girl's stimulated fancies followed the man's words; she visualized the great caldrons in which the fusing metals grew red and an intolerable white; saw men and women draw near, proud blue blood on one hand and the lowly on the other, with one thought; saw the maidens and ladies from the courtyards of the king's palace as they removed golden bracelets and necklaces from white arms and throats, so that the red and yellow gold might go with their prayers into the molten metals, enrichening them, while those whose poverty was great but whose devotion was greater offered what little silver ornaments they could. Carved silver vases, golden cups, minted coins and cherished ornaments, all were offered generously, devoutly, until the blazing caldrons had mingled the queen's girdle-clasps with a bauble from the beggar girl.

"And in the end," smiled Engle, "there are no bells with the sweet tone of old mission bells, or with their soft eloquence."

While he was talking Ignacio Chavez had allowed the dangling rope to slip from his hands so that the Captain rested quiet in the starshine. Roderick and Florence were coming in through the wide patio door; Norton was just saying that Florrie had promised to play something for him when the front door knocker announced another visitor. Florence made a little disdainful face as though she guessed who the newest caller would be; Engle went to the door.

Even Virginia Page in this land of strangers knew who the man was. For she had seen enough of him today, on the stage across the weary miles of desert, to remember him and to dislike him. He was the man whom Galloway and the stage driver had called "Doc," the sole representative of the medical fraternity in San Juan until her coming. She disliked him first vaguely and with purely feminine instinct; secondly because of an air, which he never laid aside, of serene consciousness of self-superiority.

He had come into what he was pleased to look upon as a community of nobodies, people whom he had the right to look on as his inferiors intellectually and culturally. He was of that type of man-animal that lends itself to fairly accurate cataloging at the end of the first five minutes' acquaintance. The most striking of the physical attributes about his person as he entered were his little mustache and neatly-trimmed beard and the diamond stickpin in his tie. Remove these articles and it would have been difficult to distinguish him from countless thousands of other inefficient and opinionated individuals.

Virginia noted that both Mr. and Mrs. Engle shook hands with him if not very cordially at least with good-humored toleration; that Florence treated him to a stiff little nod; that Roderick Norton from across the room greeted him coolly.

"Dr. Patten," Engle was saying, "this is our cousin Virginia Page."

Dr. Patten acknowledged the introduction and sat down, turning to ask "how Florrie was today." Virginia smiled, sensing a rebuke in his manner; today on the stage she had made it obvious even to him that if she must speak with a stranger she would vastly prefer the talk of the stage-driver to that of Dr. Caleb Patten.

When Florence, replying briefly, turned to the piano Patten addressed Norton.

"What was our good sheriff doing today?" he asked banteringly, as though the subject he chose were the most apt one imaginable for jest. "Another man killed in broad daylight and no one to answer for it! Why don't you go get 'em, Roddy?"

Norton stared at him steadily and finally said merely——

"When a disease has fastened itself upon the body of a community it takes time to work a cure, Dr. Patten."

"But not much time to let the life out of a man like the chap from Las Palmas! Why, the man who did the shooting couldn't have done a nicer job if he'd been a surgeon. One bullet square through the cartoid artery—that leads from the heart to the head," he explained as though his listeners were children athirst for knowledge which he and none other could impart. "The cerebrum penetrated by a second——"

What other technicality and elucidation might have followed was lost in a thunderous crashing of the piano keys as Florence Engle strove to drown the man's utterance and succeeded so well that for an instant he sat gaping at her.

"I can't stand that man!" Florence said sharply to Norton, and though the words did not travel across the room Virginia was surprised that even so completely armored an individual as Caleb Patten could fail to grasp the girl's meaning.

When Florence had pounded her way through a noisy bit of rag-time Caleb Patten, with one of his host's cigars lighted, was leaning a little forward in his chair, alert to seize the first opportunity of snatching a fresh conversation by the throat.

"Kid Rickard admits killing Bisbee," he said to Norton. "What are you going to do about it? The first thing I heard when I got in from a professional call a little while ago was that Rickard was swaggering around town, saying that you wouldn't gather him in because you were afraid to."

The sheriff's face remained unmoved though the others looked curiously to him and back to Patten who was easy and complacent and vaguely irritating.

"I imagine you haven't seen Jim Galloway since you got in, have you?" Norton returned quietly.

"No," said Patten. "Why? What has Galloway got to do with it?"

"Ask him. He says Rickard killed Bisbee in self-defense."

"Oh," said Patten. And then, "If Galloway says so I guess you are right in letting the Kid go."

And, a trifle hastily it seemed to Virginia, he switched talk into another channel, telling of the case on which he had been out today, enlarging upon its difficulties with which, it appeared, he had been eminently fitted to cope. There was an amused twinkle in John Engle's eyes as he listened.

"By the way, Patten," the banker observed when there came a pause, "you've got a rival in town. Had you heard?"

"What do you mean?" asked the physician.

"When I introduced you just now to our cousin Virginia, I should have told you; she is Dr. Page, M. D."

Again Patten said "Oh," but this time in a tone which through its plain implication put a sudden flash into Virginia's eyes. As he looked toward her there was a half-sneer upon his lips which his scanty growth of beard and mustache failed to hide. Had he gone on to say, "A lady doctor, eh?" and laughed, the case would not have been altered.

"It seems so funny for a girl to be a doctor," said Florence, for the first time referring in any way to Virginia since she had flown to the door, expecting Norton alone. Even now she did not look toward her kinswoman.

JOHN ENGLE replied, speaking crisply. But just what he said Virginia did not know. For suddenly her whole attention was withdrawn from the conversation, fixed and held by something moving in the patio. First she had noted a slight change in Rod Norton's eyes, saw them grow keen and watchful, noted that they had turned toward the door opening into the little court where the fountain was, where the wall lamp threw its rays wanly among the shrubs and through the grape arbor. He had seen something move out there; from where she sat she could look the way he looked and mark how a clump of rose bushes had been disturbed and now were growing motionless again in the quiet night.

Wondering, she looked again to Norton. His eyes told nothing now save that they were keen and watchful. Whether or not he knew what it was so guardedly stirring in the patio, whether he like herself had merely seen the gently agitated leaves of the bushes, she could not even guess. She started when

Engle addressed some trifling remark to her; while she evaded the direct answer she was fully conscious of the sheriff's eyes steady upon her. He, no doubt, was wondering what she had seen.

It was only a moment later that the sheriff rose and went to Mrs. Engle, telling her briefly that he had had a day of it, in the saddle since dawn, wishing her good night. He shook hands with Engle, nodded to Patten, and coming to Virginia said lightly but, she thought, with an almost sternly serious look in his eyes:

"We're all hoping you like San Juan, Miss Page. And you will, too, if the desert stillness doesn't get on your nerves. But then silence isn't such a bad thing after all, is it? Good night."

She understood his meaning and though a thrill of excitement ran through her blood answered laughingly:

"Shall a woman learn from the desert? Have I been such a chatter-box, Mrs. Engle, that I am to be admonished at the beginning to learn to hold my tongue?"

Florence looked at her curiously, turned toward Norton and then went with him to the door. For a moment their voices came in an indistinguishable murmur down the hallway; then Norton was gone and Florence returned slowly to the living-room.

Again and again Virginia looked out into the patio. Never a twig stirred now; all was as quiet as the sleeping fountains, as silent and mystery-filled as the desert itself. Had Roderick Norton seen more than she? Did he know who had been out there? Was here the beginning of some further sinister outgrowth of the lawlessness of Kid Rickard? Of the animosity of Jim Galloway? Was she presently to see Norton himself slipping into the patio from the other side, was she again to hear the rattle of pistol shots?

He had asked that she say nothing; she had unhesitatingly given him her promise. Had she so unquestioningly done as he had requested because he was the sheriff who represented the law, or because he was Roderick Norton who stood for fine, upstanding manhood? Again she felt Florence Engle'e eyes fixed upon her.

"Florence is prepared at the beginning to dislike me," she thought. "Why? Just because I walked with him from the hotel?"

In the heat of an argument with Mrs. Engle there came an interruption. The banker's wife was insisting that Virginia "do the only sensible thing in the world," that she accept a home under the Engle roof, occupying the room already made ready for her. Virginia, warmed by the cordial invitation, while deeply grateful felt that she had no right to accept. She had come to San Juan to make her own way; she had no claim against the hospitality of her kinswoman, certainly no such claim as was implied now.

Besides, there was Elmer Page. Her brother was coming to join her tomorrow or the next day and as soon as it could be arranged they would take a house all by themselves, or if that proved impossible, would have a suite at the hotel. At the moment when it seemed that a deadlock had come between Mrs. Engle's eagerness to mother her cousin's daughter and Virginia's inborn sense of independence, the interruption came.

It arrived in the form of a boy of ten or twelve, a ragged, scantily-clothed, swarthy youngster, rubbing a great toe against a bare leg, while from the front door he announced that Ignacio Chavez was sick, that he had eaten something *muy malo*, that he had pains and that he prayed that the doctor cure him.

Patten grunted his disgust.

"Tell him to wait," he said briefly. And, in explanation to the others, "There's nothing the matter with him. I saw him on the street just before I came. And wasn't he ringing his bell not fifteen minutes ago?"

But the boy had not completed his message. Ignacio was sick and did not wish to die and so had sent him to ask the Miss Lady Doctor to come to him. Virginia rose swiftly.

"You see," she said to Mrs. Engle, "what a nuisance it would be if I lived with you? May I come to see you tomorrow?"

While she said good night Engle got his hat.

"I'll go with you," he said. "But, like Patten, I don't believe there is much the matter with Chavez. Maybe he thinks he'll get a free drink of whisky."

"You see again," laughed Virginia from the doorway, "what it would be like, Mrs. Engle; if every time I had to make a call and Mr. Engle deemed it necessary to go with me—I'd have to split my fees with him at the very least! And I don't believe that I could afford to do that."

"You could give me all that Ignacio pays you," chuckled Engle, and never miss it!"

The boy waited for them and, when they came out into the starlight, flitted on ahead of them. When they got to the cottonwoods a man stepped out to meet them.

"Hello," said Engle, "it's Norton."

"I sent the boy for Miss Page," said Norton quicky. "I had to have a word with her immediately. And I'm glad that you came, Engle. I want a favor of you; a mighty big favor of Miss Page."

The boy had passed on through the shadows and now was to be seen on the street.

"I guess you know you can count on me, Rod," said Engle, showing no surprise at Norton's information.

"I want you, when you go back to the house, to say that you have learned that Miss Page likes horseback-riding; then send a horse for her to the hotel stable, so that if she likes she can have it in the early morning. And say nothing about my having sent the boy."

Engle did not answer immediately. He and Virginia stood trying to see the sheriff's features through the darkness. He had spoken quietly enough and yet there was an odd new note in his voice; it was easy to imagine how the muscles about his lean jaw had tensioned, how his eyes were again the hard eyes of a man who saw his fight before him.

"I can trust you, John," continued Norton quickly. "I can trust Ignacio Chavez; I can trust Julius Struve. And, if you want it in words of one syllable, I can not trust Caleb Patten!"

"*Hm*," said Engle. "I think you're mistaken there, my boy."

"Maybe," returned Norton. "But I can't afford right now to make any mistakes. Further," and in the gloom they saw his shoulders lifted in a shrug, "I am trusting Miss Page because I've got to! Which may not sound pretty, but which is the truth."

"Of course I'll do what you ask," Engle said. "Is there anything else?"

"No. Just to go on with Miss Page to see Ignacio. He will pretend to be doubled up with pain and will tell his story of the tinned meat he ate for dinner. Then you can see her to the hotel and go back home, sending the horse over right away. Then she will ride with me to see a man who is hurt—or she will not and I'll have to take a chance on Patten."

"Who is it?" demanded Engle sharply.

"It's 'Brocky' Lane," returned Norton, and again his voice told of rigid muscles and hard eyes. "He's hurt bad, too, John. And, if we're to do him any good we'd better be about it."

Engle said nothing. But the slow, deep breath he drew into his lungs could not have been more eloquent of his emotion had it been expelled in a curse.

"I'll slip around the back way to the hotel," said Norton. "I'll be ready when Miss Page comes in. Good night, John."

And silently, without awaiting promise or protest from the girl, he was gone into the deeper shadows of the cottonwoods.

CHAPTER VI

IGNACIO CHAVEZ, because thus he could be of service to *el señor* Roderico Nortone whom he admired vastly and loved like a brother, drew to the dregs upon his fine Latin talent, doubled up and otherwise contorted and twisted his lithe body until the sweat stood out upon his forehead. His groans would have done ample justice to the occasion had he, in sober truth, been dying.

Virginia treated him sparingly to a harmless potion she had secured at her room on the way by, put the bottle into the hands of Ignacio's withered and anxious old mother, informed the half-dozen Indian onlookers that she had arrived in time and that the bell-ringer would live, and then was impatient to go with Engle to Struve's hotel. Here Engle left her to return to his home and to send the saddle-horse he had promised Norton.

"You can ride, can't you, Virginia?" he had asked her.

"Yes," she assured him.

"Then I'll send Persis around; she's the prettiest thing in horseflesh you ever saw. And the gamest. And, Virginia——"

He hesitated.

"Well?" she asked.

"There's not a squarer, whiter man in the world than Rod Norton," he said emphatically. "Now good night and good luck and be sure to drop in on us tomorrow."

She watched him as he went swiftly down the street; then she turned and went into the hotel, down the hall which echoed to the click of her heels, and to her room.

She had barely had time to change for her ride and to glance at her "war bag" when a discreet knock sounded at her door. Going to the door she found that it was Julius Struve instead of Norton.

"You are to come with me," said the hotel-keeper softly. "He is waiting with the horses."

They passed through the dark dining-room, into the pitch-black kitchen and out at the rear of the house. A moment Struve paused, listening. Then, touching her sleeve, he hurried away into the night, going toward the black line of cottonwoods, the girl keeping close to his heels.

At the dry arroyo Norton was waiting, holding two saddled horses. Without a word he gave her his hand, saw her mounted, surrendered Persis' jerking reins into her gauntleted hands and swung up to the back of his own horse. Struve had already turned back to the hotel. In another moment, and still in silence, Virginia and Norton were riding away from San Juan, keeping in the shadows of the trees, headed toward the mountains in the north.

And now suddenly Virginia found that she was giving herself over utterly, unexpectedly to a keen, pulsing joy of life. She had surrendered into the sheriff's hands the little leather case which contained her emergency bottles and instruments; they had left San Juan a couple of hundred yards behind; their horses were galloping; her stirrup struck now and then against Norton's boot.

John Engle had not been unduly extravagant in praise of the mare Persis; Virginia sensed rather than saw clearly the perfect, beautiful creature which carried her, delighted in the swinging gallop, drew into her soul something of the serene grandeur of a starlit night on the desert. The soft thud of shod hoofs in yielding soil was music to her, mingled as it was with the creak of saddle leather, the jingle of bridle and spur chains. She wondered if there had ever been so perfect a night, if she had ever mounted so finely bred a saddle-animal.

Far ahead the San Juan Mountains lifted their serrated ridge of ebony. On all other sides the flat lands stretched out seeming to have no end, suggesting to the fancy that they were kin in limitlessness to the clear expanse of the sky. On all hands little wind-shaped ridges were like crests of long waves in an ocean which had just now been stilled, brooded over by the desert silence and the desert stars.

"I suppose," said Norton at last, "that it's up to me to explain."

"Then begin," said Virginia, "by telling me where we are going."

He swung up his arm, pointing.

"Yonder. To the mountains. We'll reach them in about two hours and a half. Then, in another two hours or so, we'll come to where Brocky is. Way up on the flank of Mt. Temple. It's going to be a long, hard climb. And for you, at the end of a tiresome day——"

"How about yourself?" she asked quickly, and he knew that she was smiling at him through the dark. "Unless you're made of iron I'm almost inclined to believe that after your friend Brocky I'll have another patient. Who is he?"

"Brocky Lane? I was going to tell you. You saw something stirring in the patio at Engle's? I had seen it first; it was Ignacio who had slipped in under the wide arch from the gardens at the rear of the house. He had been sent for me by Tom Cutter, my deputy. Brocky Lane is foreman of a big cattle-ranch lying just beyond the mountains; he is also working with me and with Cutter, although until I've told you nobody knows it but ourselves and John Engle. Before the night is out you'll know rather a good deal about what is going on, Miss Page," he added, thoughtfully.

"More than you'd have been willing for me to know if circumstances hadn't forced your hand?"

"Yes," he admitted coolly. "To get anywhere we've had to sit tight on the game we're playing. But, from the word Cutter brings, poor old Brocky is pretty hard hit, and I couldn't take any chances with his life even though it means taking chances in another direction."

He might have been a shade less frank; and yet she liked him none the less for giving her the truth bluntly. He was but tacitly admitting that he knew nothing of her; and yet in this case he would prefer to call upon her than on Caleb Patten.

"No, I don't trust Patten," he continued, the chain of thought being inevitable. "Not that I'd call him crooked so much as a fool for Jim Galloway to juggle with. He talks too much."

"You wish me to say nothing of tonight's ride?"

"Absolutely nothing. If you are missed before we get back Struve will explain that you were called to see old Ramorez, a half-breed over yonder toward Las Estrellas. That is, provided we get back too late for it to appear likely that you are just resting in your room or getting things shipshape in your office. That's why I am explaining about Brocky."

"Since you represent the law in San Juan, Mr. Norton," she told him, "since further Mr. Engle endorses all that you are doing, I believe that I can go blindfolded a little. I'd rather do that than have you forced against your better judgment to place confidence in a stranger."

"That's fair of you," he said heartily. "But there are certain matters which you will have to be told. Brocky Lane has been shot down by one of Jim Galloway's crowd. It was a coward's job done by a man who would run a hundred miles rather than meet Brocky in the open. And now the thing which we don't want known is that Lane even so much as set foot on Mt. Temple. We don't want it known that he was anywhere but on Las Cruces Rancho; that he was doing anything but giving his time to his duties as foreman there."

"In particular you don't want Jim Galloway to know?"

"In particular I don't want Jim Galloway to so much as suspect that Brocky Lane or Tom Cutter or myself have any interest in Mt. Temple," he said emphatically.

"But if the man who shot him is one of Galloway's crowd, as you say——"

"He'll do no talking for a while. After having seen Brocky drop he took one chance and showed half of his cowardly carcass around a boulder. Whereupon Brocky, weak and sick and dizzy as he was, popped a bullet into him."

She shuddered.

"Is there nothing but killing of men among you people?" she cried sharply. "First the sheepman from Las Palmas, then Brocky Lane, then the man who shot him——"

"Brocky didn't kill Moraga," Norton explained quietly. "But he dropped him and then made him throw down his gun and crawl out of the brush. Then Tom Cutter gathered him in, took him across the county line, gave him into the hands of Ben Roberts who is sheriff over there, and came on to San Juan. Roberts will simply hold Moraga on some trifling charge and see that he keeps his mouth shut until we are ready for him to talk."

"Then Brocky Lane and Tom Cutter were together on Mt. Temple?"

"Near enough for Tom to hear the shooting."

They grew silent again. Clearly Norton had done what explaining he deemed necessary and was taking her no further into his confidences. She told herself that he was right, that these were not merely his own personal secrets, that as yet he would be unwise to trust a stranger further than he was forced to. And yet, unreasonably or not, she felt a little hurt. She had liked him from the beginning and from the beginning she felt that in a case such as his she would have trusted to intuition and have held back nothing. But she asked none of the questions which none the less insisted upon presenting themselves to her:

What was the thing that had brought both Brocky Lane and Tom Cutter to Mt. Temple? What had they been seeking there in a wilderness of crag and cliff? Why was Roderick Norton so determined that Jim Galloway should not so much as suspect that these men were watchful in the mountains? What sinister chain of circumstances had impelled Moraga, who Norton said was Galloway's man, to shoot down the cattle foreman? And Galloway himself, what type of man must he be if all that she had heard of him were true, what were his ambitions, his plans, his power?

BEFORE long Norton pointed out to her, looming ever vaster before them, the shadowy form of Mt. Temple, its mass of rock, of wind-blown, wind-carved peaks lifted in somber defiance against the star-filled sky. It brooded darkly over the lower slopes, like an incubus it dominated the other spines and ridges, its gorges filled with shadow and mystery, its precipices making the sense reel dizzily. And somewhere, high up there against the sky, alone, suffering, perhaps dying, a man had waited through the slow hours, still waited for their coming. How slowly she and Norton were riding, how heartless of her to have felt the thrill of pleasure which had possessed her so utterly an hour ago!

Or less than an hour. For now again, wandering out far across the open lands, came the heavy mourning of the bell.

"How far away can one hear it?" she asked, surprised that from so far away its ringing came so clearly.

"I don't know how many miles," he answered. "We'll hear it from the mountain. I should have heard it today, long before I met you by the arroyo, had I not been traveling through two big bands of Engle's sheep. I wonder if your medicine has cured Ignacio?"

Behind them San Juan drawn into the shadows of night but calling to them in mellow-toned cadence of sorrow, before them the somber cañons and iron flanks of Mt. Temple and somewhere still several hours away Brocky Lane lying helpless and perhaps hopeless; grim by day the earth hereabouts was inscrutable by night, a mighty, primal sphinx, lip-locked, spirit-crushing. The man and girl riding swiftly side by side felt in their different ways according to their different characters and previous experience the mute command laid upon them and for the most part their lips were hushed.

There came the first slopes, the talus of strewn, broken, disintegrating rock and then the first of the cliffs. Now the sheriff rode in the fore and Virginia kept her frowning eyes always upon his form leading the way. They turned to the left, entered the broad mouth of a ravine, found an uneven trail, and were swallowed up by its utter and impenetrable blackness.

"Give Persis her head," Norton advised her. "She'll find her way and follow me."

His voice, low-toned as it was, stabbed through the silence, startling her, coming unexpectedly out of the void which had drawn him and his horse gradually from the reach of her straining eyes. She sighed, sat back in her saddle, relaxed, loosened her reins.

For an hour they climbed almost steadily, winding in and out, frequently riding five hundred or a thousand feet to accomplish a hundred of the distance toward Brocky Lane. Now, high above the bed of the gorge, the darkness had thinned about them; more than once the girl saw the clear-cut silhouette of man and beast in front of her or swerving off to right or left.

When after a long time he spoke again he was waiting for her to come up with him. He had dismounted, loosened the cinch of his saddle and tied his horse to a stunted, twisted tree in a little flat.

"We have to go ahead on foot now," he told her as he put out his hand to help her down. And then as they stood side by side, "Tired much?"

"No," she answered. "I was just in the mood to ride. Which way now?"

He took down the tie-rope from her saddle-strings, tied Persis a dozen paces from his own horse and saying briefly, "This way," again went on. She kept her place almost at his heels, now and again accepting the hand he offered as their way grew steeper underfoot. Half an hour ago she knew that they had swerved off to the left, away from the deep gorge into whose mouth they had ridden so far below; now she saw that they were once more drawing close to the steep-walled cañon. Its emptiness, black and sinister, lay between them and a group of bare peaks which were lifted like cathedral spires against the sky.

"This would be simple enough in the daytime," Norton told her during one of their brief pauses. "In the dark it's another matter. Not tired out are you?"

"No," she assured him for the second time, although long ago she would have gladly thrown herself down to rest were their errand any less imperative.

"We've got some pretty steep climbing ahead of us yet," he went on quietly. "You've got to be careful not to slip. Oh," and he laughed carelessly, "you'd stop before you got to the bottom, but then a drop of even half a dozen feet is no joke here. If you'll pardon me I'll make sure for you."

With no further apology or explanation he slipped the end of a rope about her waist, tying it in a hard knot. Until now she had not even known that he had brought a rope; now she wondered just how hazardous the hidden trail was which they were traveling; if it were in truth but the matter of half a dozen feet which she would fall if she slipped? He made the other end of the short rope fast about his own body, said "Ready?" and again she followed him closely.

There came little flat spaces, then broken boulders to clamber through and over, then steep, rugged climbs when they grasped the rough rocks with both hands and moved on with painful slowness. It seemed to the girl that they had been climbing for long, tedious hours since they had slipped out of their saddles; though to him she said nothing, locking her lips stubbornly, she knew that at last she was tired, very tired, that an end of this laborious ascent must come soon or she would be forced to stop and lie down and rest.

"Fifteen minutes," said the sheriff, "and we're there. We'll use the first five minutes of it for a rest, too."

He made her sit down, unstoppered a canteen which, like the coil of rope, she did not know he carried, and gave her a drink of water which seemed to her the most wonderfully strength-making, life-giving draft in the world. Then he dropped down at her side, looked at his watch in the light of a flaring match carefully cupped in his hand, and lighted his pipe.

"Nearly midnight," he told her.

Without replying she lay back against the slope of the mountain, closed her eyes and relaxed, breathing deeply. She was very tired now, a moment ago her whole body had been trembling to the long-continued strain put upon her muscles. Her chest expanded deeply to the long indrawn breath which filled her lungs with the rare air. She felt suddenly a little sleepy, dreaming longingly of the unutterable content one could find in just going to sleep with the cliff-scarred mountainside for couch.

She stirred and opened her eyes. Rod Norton, the sheriff of San Juan, a man who a few brief hours ago had been unknown to her, his name even strange, sat two paces from her, smoking. She and this man of whom she still knew rather less than nothing were alone in the world; just the two of them lifted into the sky, separated by a dreary stretch of desert land from other men and women—bound together by a bit of rope. She tried to see his face; the profile, more guessed than seen, appeared to her fancy as hard and stern as the line of cliff just beyond him, clear-cut against the sky.

Somehow—she did not definitely formulate the thought, she was at the time but dimly, vaguely conscious of it—she was glad that she had come to San Juan. And she was not afraid of the silent man at her side, not sorry that circumstance had given them this night and its labors.

Norton knocked out his pipe. Together they got to their feet.

"More careful than ever now," he cautioned her. "Look out for each step and go slowly. We're there in ten minutes. Ready?"

"Ready," she answered.

TO BE CONTINUED

ABANDONED IN THE ICE

BY CHART PITT

THERE'S a blotch tonight on the snow-fields white,
And the frost-locked floe-bergs fret
'Gainst the oaken sides where a whale-ship rides
With her frozen canvas set.
The star-frost sifts where she dreams and drifts
In the grip of a crystal sea—
But the buried trails of the bowhead whales
Urge her on through eternity.

There's a scented breeze on the southern seas
Where her sister ships decay.
But she laughs at time in that frozen clime
Where the blinding blizzards play.
The auroras flare in the bitter air
Where the deadly ice-dust swirls—
Waking the fires of lost desires
In her cordage of crusted pearls.

PEARLS OF GREAT PRICE

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Marooner," "The Ferret and the Bet," etc.

LOUIS BODIN, "Levuka Louis," and Jim Hurley, "Hawkbill Hurley," were the two greatest and most successful rogues in the South Seas.

Ostensibly, the business of Bodin centered in his Levuka "Snuggery," a top-chop place of entertainment, bed and board for none below the rank of mate or supercargo. How much Louis owned, no one in Melanesia knew, though many guessed. Hurley possessed two or three *copra* plantations, two schooners, a barkantine and a launch—and liked to talk about them. Bodin's pudgy, dextrous fingers were in many pies of which he invariably superintended the division. Both had brains but, where Louis preferred *finesse*, Hurley was apt to bluff.

Commerce was sluggish in Melanesia since the commencement of the Great War. The need of corn had entirely eclipsed the call for copra; tortoise shell—from the hawkbill turtle—was no longer in demand. China was in trouble and the trade in sea-slugs—*bêche-de-mer*—languished.

Pearls? One can always sell pearls in Tahiti—at a price. Louis had a proprietary interest in certain pearl lagoons but he was giving these varying proportions of the seven years necessary rest between cullings. The value of a gray pearl, or a pink, any color outside of white, doubles when such gems are matched.

According to Bodin's philosophy, any fool can make money when times are good. In days like these, it took brains to gather profit. He relaxed his purely physical functions and concentrated his vitality in his brain-cells. His bright eyes dulled and his eyelids drooped as he lolled in his bamboo chair on the shady veranda, a native boy swaying a feather *kahili* to keep away the flies.

There is a wireless at Levuka, which is on the island of Oavalu, east of Viti Levu. Louis had a radio station of his own with which he issued his trade mandates and gleaned the passing news of the air. Over on the main island of the Fijis, on Viti Levu, is Suva, capital and head of the resident British Government.

The morning's report was in Louis' hand and in it was the latest from Suva. It was in code but Louis had deciphered it. As an Ally he was in good standing with the Government though sometimes suspected of sailing overclose to the mark, not of loyalty but of legality.

The French possessions in Melanesia, outside of the Loyalties and the penal settlement of New Caledonia, are negligible and, at Levuka, Louis was the king frog in a puddle large enough for his activity. The raiding of German colonies by British and French cruisers was balm to Louis' Alsatian soul and the present item that such settlements were being held jointly by English and Gallic Governments until final distribution, furnished him pleasant food for meditation.

The *kahili* waved on automatically. The boy watched the rise and fall of the sash that bound Louis' generous stomach, a ribbon of color between the spotless linen of his trousers and the white silk of his shirt. The master's eyes seemed closed but the diaphragmatic respiration was too controlled for slumber. Tomi's soul lusted for a cool, green coconut with a surreptitious slug of gin added thereto, but his soul was in thrall to Bodin and he fanned on.

The languid figure came to action with a smart clap of palms to which a second loin-clad boy responded promptly.

"Hari, you take um canoe, ten men along of you. You go Rewa on Viti Levu—my word, better you walk along plenty fast, go catch Kapitani Wells. You speak him come along here Levuka way, plenty quick, in his schooner."

The *kanaka* vanished and Louis relaxed again. He would have sent his fast launch but the screw had fouled the top of a floating coco-palm in the darkness and, until another came from Suva, the craft was out of commission. Behind lowered lids he visioned the canoe speeding south and west with the paddles blading briskly to a chant. A slight sweat broke out on his olive features. The sash rose and fell. So did the *kahili*.

"Tomi, suppose you stop along fan me one *lele* second, my word, you plenty sorry. Fanchon!"

A sleek-coated bull terrier trotted out from a corner, yawning.

"Fanchon," said Louis, still with closed eyes. "You watch along this boy."

Tomi looked at the bitch who ran out a pink tongue over ivory fangs and grinned back at him, surveying him with eyes that were very like her master's. In the back of his sluggish brain he registered a thought.

"Too much devil-smart this white fellow boss along me," and the *kahili* resumed its regular, rhythmic sweep.

REWA is on the eastern coast of Viti Levu at the mouth of Rewa River, fifty miles from Levuka. In its higher reaches the idle fleet of Melanesian traders lay where the fresh water would arrest the bottom growth.

Hurley sat in the cockpit of his launch, fishing for mullet at the turn of the tide. Two fathoms below half a dozen baked and split breadfruit had been spiked to the bottom with sharp stakes, serving as ground-bait to the silvery fish.

Breadfruit baited his hook and he was just hauling in his eighth mullet when he saw the canoe with Bodin's head boy steering, battle up-stream against the ebb; make for the *Akua*, Wells' schooner, deliver a message that resulted in instant activity aboard and then, their errand completed, he watched the crew paddling ashore to where a covey of *kanakas* were basking in the mottled shade beneath a clump of pandanus. There they would rest and visit a while before returning.

The *Akua* was the fastest schooner in the Fijis, bar one. That was Hurley's flagship, the *Lehua*, a Gloucester-fisherman type. To maintain speed supremacy, Bodin had bought his fast launch, the *Fleur-de-Lys*. The launch in which Hurley was fishing was but a small one, practically a tender, with eight knots to the *Fleur-de-Lys'* fifteen. Hurley would have purchased a sixteen or eighteen-knot power-boat had not times been so dull and deliveries so uncertain.

How much Wells was owner of his schooner, how large was Bodin's interest, Hurley only surmised. He knew that Wells had been stranded at Levuka after the wrecking of the trading barkantine of which he was mate and that Bodin had snapped up the smart young Yankee, staked him to the *Akua* and given him certain shares.

But any ripple of activity in these dull times was worthy of attention. Bodin's movements invariably meant money in sight and in these prospective profits Hurley instantly determined to share. He ordered the *kanaka* with him in the launch to haul in the anchor, started the engine and puttered over to the *Lehua*.

"Billi, you take this bottle *kini-kini* (gin) along those fellows. All same you hide him, you tell them you make um steal, you give um drink, find out from Hari what for he come along see Kapitani Wells. Bimeby you come back here plenty quick."

His crafty boatswain grinned and made his way ashore. Hurley shrilled on a silver whistle and soon his own crew assembled, got into their beached whaleboat and boarded the *Lehua*. Hurley turned to his mate.

"Brady, there's something doing Levuka way. I am going in with Billi in the launch. Soon as the *Akua* clears, follow her out. Split tacks with her and be off Kokua Head at sunset. Keep inshore so they won't spot you from Levuka."

Within fifteen minutes the *Akua's* mainsail was hoisted, the cable up, the headsheets taut and she swung to the ebb, dropping down toward the mouth of Rewa River. Hurley watched her foresail mount as she caught and heeled to the trade and reached for Oavalu and Levuka.

Ten minutes later Billi came aboard with what news he could gather and Hurley took him in the launch and started in a bee-line for the *Akua's* destination, his engine giving him the power of disregarding wind and current. When he made fast at the boat-landing the schooner was inhauling sheets for her final inshore tack. The *Lehua* was not in sight. Sunset was an hour away.

"Billi," said Hurley, "you go along back of Levuka Louis' place. Kapitani Wells he come along bimeby, talk along with Louis on back *lanai*, I think. When he come ashore I make plenty talk with him, maybe till dark I keep him. You hide along bush in garden, listen what Louis speak along of him. Then you come back to Foo-Ching's place—tell me everything. Savvy?"

"I savvy plenty that *haole* (white) dog along Levuka Louis. Suppose he savvy me in bush I think he make *kai-kai* (eat)."

"You rub your self plenty *frangipani* flower that dog no can tell. Now you walk along."

Billi went with the air of a martyr, but he went. At sunset the *Lehua* crept out from the reef behind Kokua Head and sneaked offshore in the dusk. Hurley, drinking gin rickies at Foo-Ching's, awaited the result of Billi's mission, wishing that he himself could have wormed into the garden as quietly as the *kanaka*, and Billi, his body smeared with the crushed petals of pungent *frangipani*, crouched in the *crotons* under the veranda where Louis talked with Wells. Fanchon was there too, drowsily unconscious of any intruder.

* * *

"SO," SAID Louis, "you wish to enlist now that America is one of the Allies. It is good. I understand that well. But listen, *mon ami*. It will be long before you can get back to the States, by that time the war may be over. Suppose it is not, what then? You enlist—in what? You—a first-class sailing master, will you try to make of yourself a private or become a Jackie aboard a cruiser?

"I, too would serve France, old as I am. But brain is better than muscle, *mon brave*, and it is in my mind that we can help the cause here in the Fijis. I have a plan which should bring much money at the expense of those pigs of Germans. And money always wins. This money, *mon ami*, we will send to aid our braves at the front. If you will, you shall take it presently and tell them it is a gift from Louis Bodin, once of Alsace, now of the Fijis, a gift from Levuka Louis and yourself.

"It will do you no harm to be such a messenger. It is in my mind that they will need good master-mariners. Perhaps we will build with this money a little, quick ship, with you in command, to go hunting these sharks of U-boats, *nom de guerre*, that would be better than drill for six months to learn in which end of the gun fits the bayonet, *non?*"

Wells, curved of nose, lantern of jaw, nodded. Billi yawned in the *crotons*. This sort of talk was all words and idle.

"Tell me about it," said Wells. "It sounds good to me."

"In Melanesia," said Louis, "Great Britain owns twenty-one thousand square miles of islands, France seven and a half and Germany seventy-eight thousand—or she did. Now she owns nothing. It is spoils of war. By and by France and England will divide. Meanwhile, what happens? The German plantations go back to the bush for lack of men and the pearl lagoons lie untouched."

"Ah," said Wells softly. "Pearls."

In the *crotons* Billi's ears pricked up like a dog's—like Fanchon's who was beginning to sniff uneasily.

"Northeast of New Mecklenburg in the German Solomons, there is an atoll that is ripe for gathering. It has not been touched for six years and the shell is very rich. I will give you the position later, on paper. Figures talked to the air find wings, and Fanchon is uneasy. What is it, Fanchon?"

Billi was no fool. In the few words last spoken he had gathered the reason of Wells' trip, to get the pearls from the German atoll. He sensed too that, in the hot evening, his own personal odor was mastering that of the fragrant blossoms sufficiently for the dog to detect it. It was time to be moving. He started to crawl away on his belly, silently as a snake.

But, as he sinuously stretched, from the exposed armpit glands the telltale *kanaka* scent permeated the breeze, to the indignant offense of Fanchon's quivering nostrils. Without waste of growl the dog's lithe body rippled over the railing of the *lanai* and crashed into the *crotons* from which the body of Billi shot, spurred by fear of fangs.

Wells arose, half drawing his automatic from its holster, but Louis laughed.

"Let Fanchon obtain some exercise, *mon ami*," he said. "*Nom d'un nom*, see the *kanaka* run."

Across the lawn, leaping the shrubbery spread-eagled, Billi fled like a shadow in the dusk, the gray streak of Fanchon at his heels. They vanished in the palms that bordered the wild bush. There was a shriek, a yelp of triumph from Fanchon and presently the bull terrier came trotting back and laid a fragment of cloth at her master's feet. Billi had hurled himself into a mass of jungle too dense for Fanchon to tackle. But she had drawn blood and obtained a trophy and was content to leave Billi struggling in the tangle.

Louis picked up the bit of cloth. It was a strip of yellow muslin, nearly new, bright yellow with purple and red circles intertwined for pattern. He passed it to Wells.

"That came out of Hurley's trade-room," said the latter. "He has passed out two hundred fathoms of the stuff. No one else has it."

"It does not surprise me," said Louis. "He came ashore in his launch half an hour ahead of the *Akua*."

"And kept me chinning on the beach about the war till it was nearly dark," said Wells. "I left him at Ching-Foo's on the way up."

"One of his boys will steer standing for a while," said Louis. "Let us go inside. It is warmer but more private."

"This is the news I got from Suva," said Louis presently. "The Solomons are in charge of the dual Governments of France and England. The British resident will assume charge from Bougainville. The French gunboat *Leopard* will proceed from New Caledonia and inform the natives. It is doubtful if she will touch at our atoll. She must not hear your little plan. Also Hurley must not dip his fingers in this bowl of *poi*. He will try—which makes the game more interesting than *solitaire*."

Louis chuckled.

"You will provision tonight and go out on the ebb an hour before dawn. Do not wait to rot the pearls. The smell might prove traitor down the wind. Better to lose a few. You will find the best shell at the north end of the lagoon. Come to see me as soon as the tide turns. I shall be awake. I fancy Hurley may pay me a little visit and perhaps he will show some of his cards. He is a little fond of telling what he holds. Here is the position. *Eh bien, mon ami, au revoir*."

As Wells left him, the dapper little Frenchman, half pirate, half patriot, bent to scratch Fanchon behind the ears.

"So, you did not eat him, dog of my heart? Kanaka *kai-kai* is not to your liking. But you nipped him, eh? Nipped him in the breech. For that you get a better piece of meat, Fanchon."

AT NINE o'clock a sulky and subdued Billi arrived at Ching-Foo's with a furrowed flank and received first aid in the smart of carbolic acid, followed by peroxide, with an emollient in the shape of a bottle of square-face. Hurley was more than complacent at the news of the pearl atoll and took to the beach with a shirt-pocket full of cigars to work out the problem as he walked.

He and Bodin reasoned much alike. Both tried to look at situations first through the eyes of the other, then their own, playing the game several moves ahead and figuring all contingencies they could conceive.

If Louis' launch was in commission, Hurley was undone. His schooner could not follow. But he could trail the *Akua*. The joker in the pack was the position of the island. He had a plan for getting that but it meant taking Ching-Foo into part confidence and partnership. At the worst he could warn the French cruiser through the British Government at Suva. That would net him nothing save the discomfiture of Louis and he was playing for stakes—not just for the game. One thing, however, he resolved. If he could not get in on the pearls, Louis should not.

The news that Bodin had pirated from the aerograms had by this time reached Ching-Foo. Hurley gave tribute to Louis for the inspiration of the idea. He himself could not especially share Louis' patriotic fervor in spoiling the Egyptians by using German pearls to fight them with the proceeds of sale. To Hurley, in South Sea ethics of mine and thine, the pearls were legitimate trove for the first finder. His financial horizon was largely bounded by the rim of the dollar.

As the butt of his second cigar hissed into the surf-line he resolved upon his first move. He would go and see Bodin. Louis had been right when he told Wells that Hurley liked to assist his bluffs by hinting at the cards he held. Louis knew that Billi, or one of Hurley's boys, had been listening. Hurley valued rightly the episode of Fanchon and the missing square from Billi's loin-cloth.

Louis would know that Hurley knew the main factor of his scheme. Louis would know that, in the *Lehua*, with the moon in her third quarter and rising early, Hurley could follow the *Akua* wherever she went, night or day. With these aces already in his hand he might persuade Louis to split the pot.

A random thought of trying to take the pearls by force from Wells after the latter had harvested them and was on the way home, Hurley dismissed. He had run up against Wells before and the New Englander was not to be bluffed. If it came to a fight for the possession of what the Government would consider illegal treasure, Wells would give as good as he received.

Hurley lit a third cigar and wandered to the Snuggery.

Louis received him affably.

"Here's to better times," pledged Hurley.

"Of a truth," replied Louis. "Present times are dull, eh, *mon brave?*"

Wells spent no time shuffling the deck. In his walk to the Snuggery he had learned that the *Akua* was provisioning. His own schooner was fairly well stocked, lacking only water, and that he had ordered supplied. If he had to chase Wells the latter would soon see the hopelessness of trying to get away and Louis might tire of the delay.

He looked into the Frenchman's smiling eyes and read that Louis had also gone over the situation. Between men of their caliber sparring was a waste of time.

"Few good things going now, Louis," said Hurley. "When one breaks we should all be willing to share it."

"Why, *mon ami?*" returned Louis evenly.

"Square thing to do. Besides, what is the use of blocking one another? Partners don't trump aces unless they are fools."

"Of a truth. Even Fanchon knows that. Eh, my cabbage? The dog sleeps. She has been running and is tired. Have you a proposition to make to me, *mon ami?*"

Incidentally his hand strayed to where a piece of cloth lay on the table beneath a cigar box. Hurley grinned at the gesture.

"Sure have I, Louis. You're on to a good thing right now. Let me in on it."

"Or you will block my hand?"

"I'd rather be partners, Louis."

"But this enterprise is not my own. The proceeds are not to go to me."

Hurley laughed.

"I suppose not. Going to give them to charity? The Widows and Orphans Fund?"

Bodin regarded him silently for a second or two. His eyes brightened and dimmed.

"The widows and orphans? *Mon Dieu*, Hurlee, that is not a bad idea. I thank you. I had not thought of that. An excellent idea, truly. But in any event I can not share this with you."

Hurley flicked the ash from his cigar and his eyes got steely.

"You will share it, Louis, or I'll copper it. I'm on to the scheme. Piracy, that's what it practically amounts to. Not that I give a whoop about that——"

"Providing you share the loot, *mon ami.*"

"Exactly. As I say, I'm on to it."

"And you want ——"

"Half. I'll do the work. You can dish Wells. You own him. Half—or——"

"Or what, *monsieur?*"

"Or nothing. Either let me in on it or I'll let myself in. You know me, Bodin, I'm no slack-brained copra-cadger. You're clever but I'm no fool. And there's no time to lose. What do you say?"

"Not one pearl, Hurlee, not one little, tiny *baroque*."

"You think you've got an ace in the hole because you know the location. But I know what you are after and you'll have a —— of a time shaking me off."

"I know what you are drawing to, *mon ami*. You say I have an ace in the hole. I may have two. I am playing a good hand, Hurlee."

"There'll be a show-down for the pot."

Hurley rose, choleric but mastering his chagrin at the twinkle in Bodin's eyes.

Fanchon got up and sniffed gingerly at his heels to the door, standing to watch him before she went back to her master.

"That settles it," said Hurley to himself. "Widows and orphans!" he exploded aloud. "Does that Frenchy think I am a fool? Share with him? Not much. Either I rake it all in or he loses."

In the Snuggery Louis sipped at his vermouth. His eyes had dimmed again and he saw the ravaged villages of France, the weeping women and the wondering, frightened children.

"*Pour les veuves et les orphelins, Fanchon,*" he murmured. "*Par le bon Dieu, c'est une bonne idée.*"

AN HOUR before midnight, Hurley, in his launch chugged out to where the *Lehua* awaited him and the schooner passed over the rim of the horizon and patrolled on long tacks until the dawn showed the *Akua* leaving Levuka behind her, off for the Solomons.

At noon Wells gave up the attempt to shake off a swifter opponent and the two returned as they had sailed for hours, on the same tack, like evenly matched cup racers—only Wells had known that Hurley was deliberately sailing a point farther off the wind than he had to when they were close-hauled, and had as deliberately slackened his sheets when they reached, with half a knot of superior speed ever ready to be let out upon occasion.

"Never mind, *mon brave,*" said Louis when Wells reported. "We will lead him on the chase of the wild goose for a day or two. My propeller arrives from Suva on the *Manu*, Thursday. Then we shall see."

"What's the matter with Hurley getting on to that too?" said Wells. "He knows all about the accident and where you are getting the new screw. He'll see it when it comes. He'll play some trick. Tip the thing off to the Government, likely."

"If he does that," said Louis, "we will have to make a race of it with the *Leopard*. She can not make better than ten knots. You will have to stop at the Hebrides, at Malaita and maybe at Choiseul to get fresh gasoline for her tank and carry extra drums. See always you have plenty of gasoline, Wells, if we use the *Fleur-de-Lys*. I have no fancy to see her smashed by a shell, or you on New Caledonia. But I do not think Hurlee will inform—not until *le dernier resort*. We shall see what we shall see. In the meantime, *mon ami*, let us prepare for emergencies. I have something to show you. Also you can rot out the shell."

When Wells arrived aboard his schooner he wore a broad smile.

"Tim," he said to his supercargo, "Bodin's the father of all the foxes."

Tim Donnelly grinned.

"He's a whole kennel of foxes. 'Tis myself could have told you that," he said. "Levuka Louis was born with a wishbone in his mouth an' he chewed the nipples of his milk bottles to rags with his wisdom teeth whin he was yet a babe in ar-r-ms. Don't be tellin' me anything about Bodin."

Twice more the *Akua* put to sea and twice more the *Lehua* trailed her out and back. Then the inter-island steamer *Manu* came and brought a new propeller for Bodin, to the knowledge of all Levuka. And Hurley took counsel with Ching-Foo.

That evening the *Akua* went to sea once more, and once again the *Lehua* trailed her, hanging to her quarter league after league like a wolf on the trail of a wounded caribou. But Wells was not aboard the half-manned *Akua* nor Hurley on the *Lehua*. The first was closeted with Bodin in his Snuggery and the second sneaked aboard the *Manu* from a shore-boat and took passage to Suva.

Twenty-four hours later the launch *Fleur-de-Lys* passed through the reef entrance with a smother of foam at her sharp bows. Fifty miles offshore Wells saw the topsails of the two schooners returning to Levuka.

"It looks like clear sailing, Tim," he said.

"There's one thing ye should rimimber," answered Donnelly. "Louis is a fox, but

Hurley, bad 'cess to him, is a wolf. Sure, that engine runs like a watch, Skipper. What are we making?"

"A trifle better than seventeen, Tim. Are all the arms aboard?"

"Guns and cartridges—not forgettin' a stick or two of dynnymite for luck.

"The boat's a beauty," said Wells half regretfully. "It's a pity she hasn't got sticks in her. But she makes the time, and time is the essence of this contract."

DAWN rolled up the sky almost as swiftly as a spring blind jumps to the release and floods a room with light. The pearl atoll lay revealed upon the sea, sapphire to the reef and emerald within; clean cut as an etching, the palm-fronds waving in the morning breeze. The *Fleur-de-Lys* lay at anchor in the outer lagoon. There were two of these in hour-glass shape; the unlovely Teutonic name of the atoll was Pretzel Isle.

A thin thread of smoke wavered in the wind from a fire on the beach where Wells, with Donnelly and a crew of twelve men from the complement of the *Akua*, were preparing to enjoy a farewell breakfast.

A heap of shells proclaimed their industry. Gems that could not be held in a pint measure attested the richness of the fishing.

They had been there for ten busy days. Already the oyster meat, despoiled of pearls, was beginning to rot and taint the leeward air. And, so far, there had been no hint of disturbance.

The meal was leisurely finished and the crew prepared to gather fresh coconuts for the return trip. Six of them set strips of cloth about their middles and hitched themselves up the slender trunks. Wells lit his pipe and Donnelly busied himself to oversee the lading.

Unseen, unheard, unsuspected, a launch, painted white, with a buff funnel, one gilt letter at the bows, the tricolor of France trailing in the wind of her going, glided round the atoll, hidden by the palms and pandanus scrub until it had fairly entered the mouth of the outer lagoon. A puff of smoke came from a gun in her bows.

Wells jumped to his feet; his hand swung to his hip and fell as he saw the ensign and the jackets of the French marines who charged up the beach, their bayonets gleaming. An officer ran with them, revolver in hand, lanyarded to his wrist. The *kanakas* slid down the palms and gathered open-mouthed. Donnelly swore.

"That dirty wolf of a Hurley," he said. "The informin' thief of the world."

Wells knocked the ashes from his pipe and grimly faced the officer.

"*Parlez vous Français?*" demanded the latter.

"I do not," answered Wells shortly.

"Then I will spik English. This island is the property of France an' Great Britain. You have poach pearl. Those pearl I deman'."

"Divvle a pearl did we get," said Donnelly. "Some one was ahead of us—a chap named Hurley."

"Hurlee I know not," said the officer. "But you lie. Regard those shells. Would you open so many for nothing? Bah! Give me those pearl an' I leave you with warning. I have not room for you in my launch, an' I must return to my ship. Refuse—I tow you all an' then—" he shrugged his shoulders—"New Caledonia is not healthy, *mon ami.*"

"If I give you the pearls," said Wells resignedly, "you will leave us here?"

"Those are my ordaire. We know where from you come, *messieurs;* we shall keep the eye on you. Now we are ver' busy, too busy for *prisonnaires*. Perhaps you will soon fight for France an' Englan' an' this shall be forgotten."

"I am an American citizen," said Wells. "I am going to enlist."

"Me too," said Donnelly.

"*Bien.* But now, those pearl."

With a wry grimace Wells took off his belt. It was lined with chamois leather pouches designed for gold but now he emptied from them into the husk of a coconut a pint of shimmering globules, rounded, gleaming with all the tender hues of dawn. The officer poured them into a leather pouch he produced from his uniform and stowed them away.

"I must observe your gasoline," said the Frenchman. "Come to your launch."

Protestingly Wells went with them and watched them half empty the tank.

"This will hardly take me to New Mecklenburg," he grumbled. "And when I start to get more they'll pinch us."

Once more the officer shrugged.

"Ordaire, *messieurs*. You should have think of that before you play corsair. You have the chance to go where you like. I wish you *bon voyage. Au revoir.*"

The marines reentered the trim boat and the ravished pearl-gatherers watched her vanish around the atoll.

"We should have think of that before," mimicked Donnelly. "You aren't as smart as you think you are, Frenchy Frog-Eater. Hari, you start um boys dig up those drums of gasoline. We'll not put in at Mecklenburg this trip. What's the idea, Skipper?"

"We ought to have made that chap give us a receipt for the pearls, Tim."

"Fat chance. Why?"

"Did you see his eyes? He has handled pearls before. I wouldn't wonder if some of them were missing when he turns them over."

"It won't be makin' any diffirince to us now," said Tim.

"No," said Wells, relighting his pipe. "Get those nuts aboard and we'll clear out."

IT WAS six weeks later when Hurley came to Levuka on the *Manu* and went up to the Snuggery with the officers of the steamer and the passengers. He was arrayed in linen and silk, and he led the procession.

"The drinks are on me, Louis," he said. "Take the orders. Presently you may buy."

He smiled at his audience who scented a joke. The deft boys served them.

"Here's to success, Louis," said Hurley.

Bodin bowed and raised his glass.

"If you will pardon me, gentlemen, I will drink to *La France*. And to the widows and orphans," he added, in an aside to Hurley, as the guests rose to the toast.

Hurley glanced at Louis and grinned.

"Are you in the market for pearls, Louis?" he asked.

"Perhaps. Have you any? I will look at them presently," replied Louis.

"Want to do business in private? All right; that suits me. But the drinks are on you, Louis, take my word for it."

The glasses were replenished. Louis rose.

"I give you, *messieurs*," he said, "the widows and orphans of our united armies."

Once more the toast was taken standing.

"And now, Hurlee," said Louis.

He led the way to his private room and Hurley followed with a shoulder grin at the crowd. As Louis shut the door Hurley reached into the inner pocket of his coat, disclosing the slung holster of an automatic. From a leather pouch he poured on to a black silk neckerchief a pint of pearls. Louis bent gravely over them.

"They are very pretty," he said.

Hurley threw back his head and laughed.

"Louis, you are a game sport. I am almost tempted to divvy with you. Almost, not quite. Why don't you ask me where they came from? Or has Wells got back in the *Fleur-de-Lys?*"

"He has arrived and gone away again," said Louis. "To the States. On the *Mariposa*. So you need not tell me where these came from, my friend. I have guessed. One thing I do not know. How did you get the position of the atoll?"

"Game, Louis! You're a game loser. I'll let you cheat me on the price for that. The position? Wells' cook is part *pa-kê* (Chinese). I sicked Ching-Foo on to him. He went through Wells' clothes when he was asleep. Simple enough?"

"Only you have to share with Ching-Foo. That is too bad."

"There is plenty to go around, I reckon. What are they worth, Louis? Or rather, what will you give me for them?"

"I overlooked the cook," said Louis, ignoring the request for the moment. "You took that trick, *mon brave*."

"I took all of them, Louis. I told you I held the best hand. You should have seen Wells' face when they asked him for the pearls."

"You were there?"

"In the cabin of the launch. We fixed it up for a man-of-war tender. Renault from Suva was the officer. He used to be an actor once. We only just got there on time, Louis. But we should have cut you off on the way back."

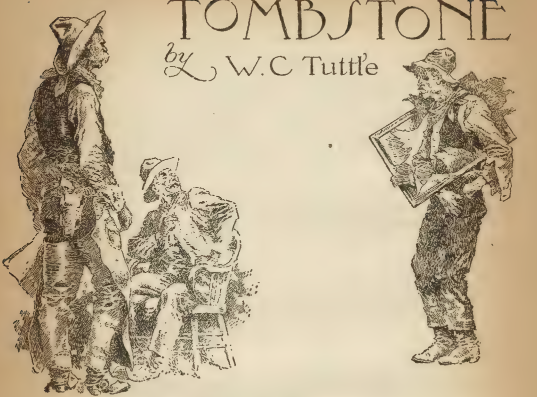
"Renault from Suva," said Louis softly. "I shall remember that name. So the marines were not real, eh Hurley? That was very clever of you."

"Fakes, every one of them," said Hurley. "Outside of Renault not one of the bunch knew a word of French. How about the pearls?" A gleam came into Louis' eyes.

"Fakes every one of them, *mon ami*. They cost me sixty dollars a long time ago. Made in Melbourne, Hurlee. I will give you sixty dollars for them. The real ones were hidden in the *Fleur-de-Lys*. I bought them, myself, on speculation, for twenty thousand dollars. Wells has the money with him, to give to widows and orphans. Never mind the gun, Hurlee. Be a good loser. *Au revoir et bon voyage.*"

TIED UP FOR TOMBSTONE

by W.C Tuttle



Author of "Loco or Love," "Making Good for Muley," etc.

"LODESTONE, you flea-bitten, long-eared ancestor of a jack-rabbit, take a look at the best place the Lord ever made, and rejoice with me."

Lodestone wiggles his ears, kicks at a hoss-fly, narrowly missing my head, and looks with sad eyes down at the city of Piperock. Then he goes to sleep. Which shows that a burro ain't got no finer feelings.

We been away for quite a while—me and Lodestone. We pilgrims up the Bitter Root range to where old Blue Nose sticks into the clouds, crosses over and pilgrims back the other side, all of which takes up several months, and don't net me nothing but blisters and blasphemy.

I misses "Magpie" Simpkins a heap, and I welcomes the day when I can shake the hand of that long, loose-jointed hombre. Magpie is one of the leading citizens of Piperock, and until a few months ago, my pardner.

When I left to make my fortune he was setting there in his office—Magpie is the sheriff—and wondering how he can square things with the populace to get reelected.

He's of the lodge-pole type, and wears a goodly length of hair on his upper lip. He pleads with me not to leave him but for once in my life I turns a deaf ear to his siren voice, and herds my burro out of hearing.

Piperock ain't what a stranger would call a paradise on earth, and she don't qualify for the milk and honey, but she's a man's town—all up and down the street.

Me and Lodestone pilgrims through the dust up to "Buck" Masterson's saloon, and I goes inside. Buck and "Tellurium" are there, and they welcomes me like a lost brother. Buck salutes me with the proper ingredients, and we exchanges pleasantries.

After we sort of gets used to each other again Buck hauls out a sheet of paper, and smooths it out on the bar.

"Take a look at that, Ike," says he. "There's something new."

I sizes her up. It's what resembles a newspaper—in some respects—but I can't seem to read it none to speak of. The label across the top resembles this—

TOLIP KCOREPIP EHT

The rest of the page is smears and blots.

"Looks like a Russian proclamation, Buck," says I. "Where did it come from?"

"Right here, Ike; that ex-pardner of yours published it."

"Magpie?" I asks, and they both nods.

"That's his first edition," replies Buck. "He took over the office when a few of the local boys ran the editor across the border for slandering the community. That paper invades this here country about a month after you leaves, and she runs high along until the editor gets a call to uplift the community. Yesterday he beat the posse across the line, and Magpie gets out his maiden sheet. This-here feller speaks feelingly of lawlessness, and even goes so far as to make personal remarks about our morals. What he said about the town of Paradise was awful."

"Is Magpie still sheriff?" I asks.

"Uh-huh," admits Tellurium, who ain't friendly with Magpie. "Abe Anderson was running against him, and had a grand chance to win, but Abe's old weakness crops up and spoils things."

"Abe seen a chance to run off some Circle Star cows," explains Buck. "He runs foul of Magpie and three of the Circle Star punchers, and when they gets through convincing him that, 'Thou shalt not steal,' he ain't in shape to use votes. Magpie races alone and is elected by five votes."

"Well, well," says I, "a few months sure does change the map. I'll go down and see if that benighted son of a lodge-pole don't need some help."

I prods Lodestone down the street to where I sees a sign, which proclaims there's a newspaper office. I hitches my rolling stock and goes inside. Magpie is there. All I can see is the bottom of his boots, the seat of his pants and his elbows—the rest of him is behind a newspaper, as he leans back in a chair, with his feet on the table.

I leans against the table and rolls a smoke. He glances at me, switches his cigaret over to the other side of his mouth, and goes on trying to read. I say "trying to read" for the reason that he's got a paper he printed himself.

Pretty soon he yawns and lays the paper across his knees.

"Ike," says he, "that's some paper."

"Some ink, too, if that's anything to brag about," I replies. "When did you learn to write Russian? Maybe it's Chinook with the blind staggers, Magpie, but anyway she's a terrible language. What does them big letters at the top proclaim?"

"That? Huh! *The Piperock Pilot!*"

"Won't the letters run the other way, Magpie?"

"I reckon they would, Ike, but how in —— am I going to know what she reads? It's a danged sight easier for the public to read the print backwards than it is for me to read the type thataway. I'm glad to see yuh, Ike."

"Still follering the line of least resistance, eh, Magpie? I'm glad to see you, too."

"Accumulate anything on your trip, Ike?"

"Wood-ticks, fool-hens and a growing conviction that rich rock is scarce. How's things at the sheriff's office?"

"Tolable, Ike. Won by a narrow majority. I reckon if Abe had a lived we'd 'a' needed a recount. Lot of folks voted for him after he was dead."

"They would," I agrees. "Lot of folks around here ain't got no more ambition than to vote for a corpse. How comes it you're a editor? Has all the bad-men died off or has a moral wave hit Piperock?"

"I always been a critter of circumstance, Ike," he states, unfolding his long legs, and easing his gun handy-like. "I always been a disciple of advance, and I've worn all the skin off my shoulder trying to give the wheels of progress a lift. At times them wheels have slipped and sprained my immediate future, but I never peeped.

"When this here misguided editor fades across the horizon, me, being sheriff, appropriates this here plant and opines to run it as a public institution. There's twenty-five sheets of paper left and one can of ink. My first edition takes twelve sheets, and I hereby claims that a man, without no experience, what can rise to the occasion and put out a paper like that is a credit to the community."

"Didn't you have trouble finding all them letters, Magpie?"

"Trouble? Say, the ends of my fingers

are so tender I can hold out my hands and feel the sun slide behind the hills. The next publication is problematical, Ike. I'm short of material, but I only figures on one more issue. I got a article set up, and I can't publish until the time is ripe."

"Something special?"

"Uh-huh. 'Tombstone' Todd's obituary."

"From Willer Crick?" I asks, and Magpie nods.

"Uh-huh. Him and 'Cactus' Collins comes over here to help elect Abe Anderson, being as Abe was a relative. When Abe departs this here vale of tears they up and proclaims they're a pair of howling wolves, and that they're a permanent fixture around here until such a time as they lays me on my back and gestures over me with a spade. Awful pair of gobblers, Ike."

"Why not an obituary for Cactus, too, Magpie?"

"He's hiding out until such a time as his stummick is normal, Ike. He horns in on me yesterday, and gets pessimistic to my face. I'm busy on that obituary and don't like to be interrupted, so I beats him on the draw, accepts his gun as a subscription and induces him to eat a bucket of paste. Awful smelling mess, Ike. I'd opine that as far as my future horoscope is concerned his lips are sealed."

"Thirteen sheets and one obituary will be something to print," says I. "Has Tombstone made any advances?"

"Once. I was standing over there by the window, holding up one of them dinguses what contains type, when a bullet comes along and hits her plumb center. She collapses right there and ruins things. Some of that lead type enters my bosom, and for the space of a foot square on my manly chest I looks like a smallpox patient. This idea of being a man of letters ain't no prosaic pastime, Ike."

JUST then "Scenery" Sims darkens our doorway. Scenery is knee-high to a short Injun, and his voice hankers for oil. He looks mean-like at me and Magpie, and chaws some industrious. Pretty soon he expectorates copiously on the floor, and orates—

"Want to quit taking the paper."

Magpie snaps out his gun and covers Scenery.

"Get down on your knees and wipe out that —— spot!" snorts Magpie. "What do yuh think this is—a corral?"

"I—uh—" begins Scenery, but the gun don't waver, so he takes the handkerchief off his neck, and scrubs our floor.

"This is a newspaper-office, Scenery," states Magpie. "You can't start your oration with a cloud-burst in here. Sabe? What you got against the paper, and whyfor don't yuh wish it no more?"

"I can't read her," he squeaks. "She's too backward to suit me. Of course I—uh—well, send her along, and I'll—uh—do the best I can. I got to go now."

He slips out with his hat in his hand, and lopes off up the street.

"That's business, Ike," laughs Magpie. "I'm going to make 'em like it."

"When yuh had the drop on him yuh ought to 'a 'collected in advance for another year," says I. "You sure need a manager, Magpie, for *The Piperock Pilot, Limited*—to thirteen sheets and a death notice."

"Howdy, gents," states a voice at the door. "Is this the only newspaper in town?"

That person is a novelty in cowland. He stands there, exuding perfume and prosperity from his Sunday clothes. We looks him over, from his shiny shoes to his hard hat, wonders at his pink cheeks, which match his necktie, and both nods.

"You answers your own question, stranger," states Magpie. "We sure got a monopoly on all news hereabouts. Want to subscribe?"

He ambles over and sets down on a stool and looks the place over. He takes off his hat, balances it on his knee, and produces some sheets of paper.

"What's your amusement rates?" he asks. "Half-page—maybe full."

Magpie rolls a fresh smoke and studies the feller.

"Well," he drawls, "the person who operates here ahead of me makes a fixed price of three dollars for six months, but I don't sabe no case in which he split the size. I don't guarantee to amuse nobody. I'll be honest with yuh, though. This here paper is on its last legs, but I'll danged near guarantee one more issue, and if yuh hankers for it I'll put yuh down for one copy at four-bits."

"You misunderstood me," he grins, "I mean advertising rates. I'm ahead of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"

He puts his hat back on his head, and shuffles them sheets of paper:

"We are bringing to your town the greatest aggregation of stars that ever glowed over one set of footlights. Two *Evas*, two *Topsies*, three fee-rocious bloodhounds and eight——"

Splang!

The side window spills its panes over the place, and this person's hat flips off his head, and lands in my lap, while a chunk of lead bores a neat hole in the wall behind the stranger. He freezes right there.

Magpie slips his gun across his lap, settles down a little lower in his chair, and lights his cigaret. I hands the hat back to its owner, and slides my chair a few inches further back.

"Eight what?" asks Magpie.

"Ca-ca-cakes of ice," he quavers, examining his hat. "My ——! Was that a—a—bullet?"

Magpie nods and scratches his chin.

"Bullet?" he wonders again. "Did—did somebody shoot at me?"

"Nope," says Magpie. "At me. What yuh going to do with the ice?"

He looks at Magpie for a minute, and then gasps—

"At a—a time like this?"

He tucks his hat under his arm, sneaks to the door, and goes around the corner so fast his coat simply cracks.

Magpie slips his gun loose and spins the cylinder, hitches up his belt and yawns:

"Ike, I ain't got nothing to prove who it was but I has the feeling that Tombstone is going too danged far. There's such a thing as personal animosity, but when yuh bust into a man's business and cause him financial loss it's time to start a probe. That show person was about to help us pay our overhead expenses, but now he's gone gun-shy.

"I hereby deputizes you to operate this here plant, while I fulfils the obligations of my oath concerning public nuisances. You got plenty of ammunition, Ike?"

"I ain't no editor, Magpie," I objects. "I can't even sign my own name so folks can read it."

"Sign mine," says he. "You're editor *pro tempore*. Sabe?" And then he slips out of the door.

I looks around, casual-like, places my .41 beside me on a chair, and sets down out of line with any window or door. It's warm in there, and there's a funny smell about the place. I had several scoops of gall and wormwood in Buck's place, and the combination woos sleep in copious gobs. My sombrero slips over my face, and I sleep.

Sudden-like I wakes, and believe me she's a rude awakening. Somebody kicks the chair out from under me, and proceeds to knead my abdomen with their knees, toes, fingers, thumbs and head. When that part is over they turns me on my face and rakes me fore and aft with a pair of long-roweled spurs, while they links their hands in my hair and hammers my forehead on the floor. When I ain't got more than a glimmer of light left in my system they seems to draw aside and rest.

"There!" I hears a voice state. "Next time yuh prints your danged newspaper you'll please leave my name out. Sabe? I ain't no shepherd, and my shirt is as clean as yours!"

" 'Dirty Shirt' Jones, you're an assassin," says I, weak-like.

He pulls my hat off the bridge of my nose and takes a look at me.

"Ike, I'm glad to see yuh back," says he. "When did yuh get back?"

"Today. Are you the reception committee?"

"Me? Nope. I'm an enraged citizen, Ike. I mistook yuh for the editor."

"No mistake, Dirty, I'm him."

Of course I got that .41 in my hands when I makes that statement, and Dirty don't make no demonstration.

"Take it easy," I advises. "I ain't the one you're sore at. Magpie is the regular editor but he's down at the jail."

Dirty chaws for a few seconds, and hitches up his pants:

"Much obliged, Ike. Sorry I licked yuh thataway. Yuh see that paper orates that the population ought to get sanitary—whatever that is. He states that a dirty shirt designates a shepherd—dang his hide! Well, Ike, I gives yuh good afternoon."

"Good afternoon ain't much to give a man after you've give him ——," I opines. "But I'll take it, Dirty, old-timer. I reckon I'll need everything I can get before I goes to press."

I sets there and complains bitterly to myself about folks who don't keep up to date on news, wipes the worst of the ink off my face, and goes back to sleep.

"Slim" Hawkins woke me up. Slim would

make a good running-mate for Magpie. He's built in the same proportions. He's had a few drinks, and is as serious as a owl.

"Ike," says he, "take a look at my eyes and see if they're all right."

"Little off color but pointing straight, Slim. What's wrong?"

"Somebody drops a paper at the ranch today, and when I tries to peruse same I finds that I'm left-handed and cross-eyed. I've suffered a heap, Ike, and while I hopes for the best I fears the worst. I'd hate to go around looking at things backwards thataway. Might as well learn to read Chinese. Where's the educated party what operates this here newspaper?"

"He's—" I begins, but an apparition which I deciphers to be Dirty Shirt, comes in the door.

He seems to have met disaster. His hair has been pawed down over a pair of black eyes, and over his head and under one arm hangs what is left of a framed map of Montana, which adorned Magpie's office.

HE FEELS painfully in his pockets, takes out three silver dollars, and lays 'em on the table.

"Dirty Shirt Jones—three months," he states, slow and sad-like.

"Your subscription expired?" I asks, and he nods.

"Uh-huh. I reckon. Everything else has."

"Better take back some of it," I advises. "This here paper is about to cease. One more effort cleans the rack."

"I know," nods Dirty Shirt. "Keep the money and send me a copy. If Magpie can edit like he can fight I'll covet that copy."

"Keep that frame to put it in," says I. "You met the editor, did yuh?"

Dirty squints at me, adjusts that frame to a easier position, and rubs his sore eyes.

"Met him!" he snorts. "Met ——! We mingled!"

Dirty weaves out of the door and points up the street. Slim looks at them three dollars and then lays three more beside 'em.

"I don't sabe the game, Ike, but I'm matching Dirty's ante. I don't know what Magpie's argument is, but anybody what can make Dirty Shirt pay three dollars for a left-handed newspaper must have something besides conversation."

"But Dirty Shirt was sore," says I. "He came down to lick the editor."

"Me, too, Ike. I came with malice in my heart but I goes away plumb meek. Dirty Shirt licked thunder out of me once, so I'm three dollars thankful that he met Magpie first. Have a little drink?"

"That's the first United States I've heard spoken since I got home," says I. "But I can't leave the office alone. You go up and have one, and then play editor while I goes up. Sabe?"

Slim comes back in a few minutes, and holds down the place while I pilgrims up to Buck's place. Me and Buck and "Half-Mile" Smith leans on the door and discusses local conditions.

"Show troupe in town," states Half-Mile. "Came in on the stage. Seven or eight people, two colored persons and some dogs. They got a drum and a lot of horns, etcettery. I'd opine we'll have some music."

"I love a good show," says Buck. "The last good one I seen was at Silver Bend. They played Shakespeare. Had a ghost and I was just drunk enough to enjoy it."

"Give me a drink, quick!" pants a voice at the door, and into the place comes "Ricky" Henderson. He takes a long drink out of the bottle, and leans against the bar.

"Suffering surcingles!" he pants. "I've sure had one job! That or'nary hombre, Tombstone Todd, comes into my place a while ago, and climbs into a chair.

" 'Young feller,' says he, 'my hair and whiskers are too noticeable, so I admires to see 'em on the floor.' He hauls out a six-gun, lays it across his lap, and leans back in the chair. 'Young feller,' says he again, 'a razor what pulls is an abomination and a barber what uses one is flirting with the undertaker. Let your judgment be your guide.' "

"Was he satisfied?" asks Buck.

"I'm here, ain't I?" grins Ricky. "But I wouldn't do it again for a million dollars."

"And you with a razor in your hand all this time, and his head tilted back?" wonders Half-Mile, aloud.

Ricky stares at Half-Mile and considers the remark.

"I seen a colored brother with a razor once—" began Half-Mile, but he happens to glance towards the door.

We all takes a look.

"Speak of the devil and—" murmurs Buck, but the colored person at the door bursts into profanity that would shame a professor from a mule college.

"Why didn't yuh come back, Ike?" he

wails. "Sus-somebody sneaked in, hit me over the head, dud-dragged me into the back room and poured a can of ink all over me! My ——! It won't never come off! He said he wanted to make me eat some paste, but he couldn't find it. Look at me! All inked to ——!"

"Gosh!" exclaims Magpie from the doorway. "Ain't that too danged bad! That's the only can of ink there was left."

"Too bad, eh?" howls Slim. "I wish I knowed the name of that hombre."

"Did he speak feelingly of paste?" asks Magpie.

"Uh-huh," agrees Slim, drawing figures on the bar with his inky finger. "He sort of choked over the word. He——"

"Hey! Sam!" yells a voice at the door, and we observes a stranger in our midst.

It's sort of dark inside, but he seems to know what he wants. He ambles straight up to Slim, and grabs him by the arm.

"You slew-footed, wobble-jointed son of a cannibal!" he yelps. "Where's them pink silk underclothes of mine, eh?"

Slim Hawkins is slow to anger, but when he does get to going he's hard to stop. He climbs under and over and through this stranger like he was searching for something, and when he gets through this feller ain't got nothing on but a look of wonderment and one sleeve of his undershirt. Slim looks over the pile of clothes on the floor, and shakes his head:

"I can't find 'em," he states, serious-like. "Furthermore I don't admire to be called a son of a cannibal, Mister Man!"

The feller braces his hands behind him on the floor, and shakes his head like he was trying to collect his thoughts. He squints at Slim, and then explodes:

"My ——! You ain't Sam!"

"A slight inquiry would have saved us all this search," says Slim. "Who is Sam?"

"One of my company—my *Uncle Tom*."

"So?" drawled Slim. "You with this here 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' outfit?"

"Yes," says he. "I'm *Simon Legree*."

"So?"

Slim picks the gent up by one leg and an arm, carries him out and dumps him right into the street without no clothes on.

"There!" yells Slim, as the stranger hits the dirt. "I've read all about yuh, Mister Legree, and this is one colored person yuh can't run no sandy on. Sabe?"

This Legree person don't linger. It's about two hundred yards to Holt's hotel door, and he negotiates the distance in the time it takes Slim to shoot six shots into the dirt behind him. On his way he meets "Cobalt" Williams. Cobalt steps to one side to let him past, catches his spur in the dirt, and sets down. It spoils his aim, he tears the knob off the door after it shuts behind Legree. Cobalt gets up and comes on down to the saloon, shaking his head.

"What yuh trying to do—kill him? Yuh danged fool!" snorts Slim.

Cobalt had reached for the bottle, but he turns to look at Slim and his hand drops. He pushes his hat back and stares at Slim and seems to swaller with difficulty.

"Ex-cuse me," he says, sort of to himself. "No more Paradise hooch for mine! Mike Pelly said it was a hundred and twenty proof, and this proves it. First I see a naked man running around the main street, and then I meets a colored brother what looks like Slim Hawkins. I'm through! Sabe? I'm going home—me!"

He ducks out, gets his bronc at the rack and points out of town.

"That's what I'd call a temperance lecture in ink," opines Magpie. "As editor and a man of letters I congratulates yuh. We can hereby reverse that old saying, 'He who runs may read' and make it, 'He who reads may run.' "

WE INAUGURATES a poker game and plays until almost dark, when sudden-like we hears the sound of music, and stampedes to the door. Here comes that show bunch down the street, and stops in front of the old Mint Hall. They got a banner what proclaims there will be a show tonight, and "Mighty" Jones is packing the banner, with his chest stuck out like a fool-hen after a feed.

We cashes in and goes over to the band.

"When did you start to be a actor, Mighty?" asks Magpie, but the feller what Slim took apart steps between Magpie and Mighty and peers at Magpie's star.

"Pardon me," says he, "I see you're the sheriff."

"You're pardoned, and I congratulates yuh on your eyesight," replies Magpie.

"I've lost my dogs," says he. "Somebody must 'a' stole 'em."

By this time most everybody in Piperock has congregated around. Music sure is a magnet for folks and dogs.

"Pick out what yuh want," says Magpie, indicating any amount of canines, circling around through people's legs. "Losing a few dogs ain't no disaster around here."

"Mine are valuable dogs," states Legree, in a loud tone. "Trained dogs. Our show can't proceed without them dogs."

"Name, age and description," says Magpie, hauling out a little note-book. "Also any distinguishing marks and brands."

"One bloodhound, crossed with St. Bernard and collie; color, yaller; named Violet."

"*War-hoo-o-o-o!*" howls a dog up the street.

"*Yeo-o-o-o-owl*" yells somebody. "Look out!"

There's a sudden movement at the far end of the congregation. I sees a bronc turn a handspring, a pair of cream-colored broncs leaves their halters at the hitch-rack, while they comes over to visit us, and Violet is no longer a lost dog.

Violet is about the size of a he-wolf, and she seems to think she can outrun the string of tomato cans which are tied to her tail. She goes through, under and over that crowd, and what she don't do to us is left for that pair of broncs and the buckboard. A million dog-fights start right there.

Me and *Legree* are close together and the confusion seems to bring us close to each other. We hits the sidewalk together and I'm underneath. A couple of rotten boards break, and yours truly disappears.

When I recovers sufficient-like to peek out it's about all over. Every bronc that was tied to the rack is gone, and part of one rack is missing. Most of the crowd is on the far side of the street, but our side is still well represented. Two local dogs are still hauling at each other.

Dirty Shirt Jones' head protrudes from the side of that big drum, and his right arm is wedged straight up, making him look like a drownding man what is going down for the last time.

Mighty Jones has got one boot through the mechanical end of a big brass horn, while from inside the other boot protrudes that banner, with the proclamation missing.

Magpie is lying near me, with both feet through Wick Smith's picket fence; and he's still studying that little note-book.

"Was that last one Lucy or Hannibal?" he asks, slow and deliberate.

"It—it don't make no matter," says a weak voice, "they're all gone past anyway," and the man who got his hat punctured in the newspaper office rises up from behind the fence, and tugs at the brim of his hat, which is hanging around his neck.

I goes out and helps to cut Dirty Shirt loose from the drum, when up comes one of Holt's kids.

"Mister," says he to the show feller, "I seen a man tie them cans on your dogs."

"Give the sheriff a description of him," says he, excited-like. "I offers ten dollars reward for the conviction of the persons connected with the dastardly outrage."

"Cheap enough," agrees Magpie. "Did he have a long mustache and long hair?"

"Naw. He didn't have no hair on his face a-tall," replies the kid.

"Must a been an outside job," proclaims Magpie. "All the men in Piperock wear hair on their faces, except Slim Hawkins, and he wears ink."

Me and Magpie pilgrims home and uses up a bottle of hoss liniment.

"When yuh going to get that Tombstone person?" I asks, after we finishes our supper. "There ain't no sense in leaving a critter like him loose, Magpie."

"He's a ornery hombre all right, all right," agrees Magpie. "He ain't so dangerous as he is plumb mean, Ike. He's shot at me several times, but as he ain't hit me yet I reckon he's trying to scare me. Must 'a' been Cactus what painted Slim with the ink. Me and Slim are the same build.

"I sure wish that Tombstone could live long enough to read his obituary, Ike. She's a bird. I sure dug deep into my soul for that stuff, and I surprises myself with what I writes. Them two is sore over the election. They opined to be deputies under Anderson."

"That paper must 'a' printed some truths about folks," I opines, and Magpie grins:

"You said something, Ike. He sure did ride folks. Yuh ought to see what he said about Paradise folks. I reckon they're just about starting to boil over down there."

"Didn't you print yours right soon, Magpie?" I asks. "Seems to me that it's a weekly."

"Uh-huh—comes out on Friday. Yuh see I had to change that day right off the reel, 'cause if I had any hangings to attend to it would interfere with the paper. I looks into the future, Ike."

"Well," says I, "it don't make much difference now, being as the ink is all gone."

"That's so. I wish you'd 'a' stayed there and 'tended to business, Ike."

"And got all inked up, eh? I never did have any luck, and if it had 'a' been me somebody would 'a' come in and helped Cactus find that paste jar. Too bad the show got busted up thataway."

"Uh-huh," yawns Magpie. "We ain't had a good show for a long time, but I don't admire a show what depends on three dogs and eight cakes of ice. Let's hit the hay."

That night somebody comes down and paints a skull and cross bones on our door, and it makes Magpie sore.

"I'm commencing to get riled internally, Ike," he states, when he views said works of art. "You go back and hold down the newspaper, and in a little while I'll show yuh the scalp of this artist. Rustle around and see if there's any ink left.

"I got that obituary all fixed up left-handed, and she's cached under a soap-box behind the printing machine. Don't jiggle it 'cause she's fragile as ——! I left that page just like she was for the other paper, but I got a place in it what fits this here masterpiece of mine. If Tombstone should make a mistake and hit me yuh won't need the obituary. Sabe?"

"Uh-huh, I'll just run the rest, Magpie. It looks like a bundle o' crape anyway."

"And Ike," he reminds me, as I buckles on my gun, "yuh take that type stuff and put it inside the press. Sabe? Then yuh take that roller thing and pour on some ink, roll her over the letters, slap on a sheet of paper and twist that handle down hard."

"You furnish the news, Magpie," says I. "I'll hold the wheels of progress for Tombstone Todd."

I GOES up to Buck's place, and settles some elixir under my belt, while me and Buck talks over the humdrum existence we're leading.

"Dirty Shirt is still going around with his right hand up in the air," laughs Buck. "Reckon he's flagged every one in sight."

"How's the show outfit?" I asks.

"Right miserable, I reckon. All of 'em except one left on the stage this morning. That exception—a colored person—mistakes Slim for a blood-brother, and being as Slim ain't back yet, I'd say they went quite a ways. I never seen fast black fade the way that person did.

"That other colored member didn't have much to say this morning. He was packing one of them slide horns in the band last night, and when the buckboard hit him he sails right into Pete Gonyer. Him and Pete holds about even until Pete gets his hands loose, and then he winds that horn around the feller's neck so many times that we has to lay that colored gent across an anvil and cut it loose with a cold-chisel."

"Seen anything of Tombstone Todd or Cactus Collins?" I asks, but Buck says:

"Nope. Somebody ought to puncture that pair of Jaspers, Ike. I figure there's only one critter what is meaner than Tombstone Todd, and there's a bounty on his hide. I ain't been drunk for six years, Ike, but when Tombstone Todd stops enough lead to make him a spirit I'm going to celebrate. When does Magpie aim to exterminate said human coyote?"

"Magpie suffers from softening of the heart," says I "but him or Tombstone is due to hunt the hereafter right soon."

I leaves there, and pilgrims down to the newspaper office, but I don't walk right inside. Not me. The Harper tribe ain't skittish of trouble, and my nose ain't a stranger to powder smoke, but I'm cautious.

I Injuns up to the back window, flattens my carcass against the wall and peers inside. I ain't taking no chances. Sabe? It's a little too early to open up, and the sunshine is nice and warm. Everything is peaceful-looking around Piperock, so I sets down there on a box against the wall, and communes thusly:

"Ike Harper, you sure do live in the best little town on earth. Peaceful and quiet—no hurry or worry. Plenty of time to live and no questions asked. What if I am a editor? It sure is worth while to live simply and quietly in a community where brotherly love is the motto and where peace doves nest and suckle their young."

Sudden-like I hears the dull rattle of many hoofs, and down the street comes a lot of men on hosses. They completes a picture of a peaceful Western village. There ain't no boisterous or unseemly language as they ambles along through the dust—just the jingle of bit-chains and the squeak of saddles.

They don't look like they was going far, 'cause they don't seem to have no baggage. One of 'em is carrying a big bucket, and another seems to have a bundle in his arms.

They swings down towards me, but I

merely yawns. They stops in front of my office, and dismounts. I reckon it's my chore to go out and get 'em to subscribe, but I don't do it. I got enough subscriptions. They must 'a' thought the only way to get into a newspaper office was by main force, so they picks up a piece of lodge-pole, and knocks the door down.

Comes one shot—no more. Out of curiosity, more than anything else, I sort of leans forward on my box and takes note of what I can see. Out in front the crowd sort of surrounds somebody, what ain't got no clothes on. I don't hear much conversation what ain't profane, and pretty soon I sees some feathers drift away on the breeze. Two broncs are linked together with that pole, a bundle what looks like a mighty buzzard is straddled the pole, and they all moves away as quietly as they came.

I watches 'em go away, and then I yawns some more and enters the sacred precincts of *The Piperock Pilot.* I hunts all over the place until I finds a can with a little ink left in it. I looks under the soap-box and finds that obituary. After considerable trouble I deciphers same, and this is it:

EPITAPH ON TOMBSTONE

He was a bad man from Willer Crick.
His bluff was good but it didn't stick.
He shot at the sheriff till the sheriff got sore,
Now his boots leave tracks on that beautiful shore.

I wipes the tears off my cheeks when I reads it. Magpie said he had put his soul into it, but I never knowed before how deep Magpie's soul really was. It's a hy-iu composition, but I got a better idea. I takes it over to where them lead letters repose, and reconstructs the thing a bit.

I ain't no poet, but in a time like this a man's spirit guides his fingers. I works for an hour, trying to make the blamed things stand up long enough to be read backwards, and I'm sore enough to kick a baby when Magpie shows up. He looks at me and grins, when he sees what I'm doing, and rolls a smoke.

"One of 'em has left, Ike," he states. "Hank Padden rode in a while ago, and said he met Cactus Collins on his way to Willer Crick. I'll get Tombstone before night. Sabe?"

"Them is noble resolutions, Magpie. You know how to make this stuff stand up while she leaves her message on paper?"

"Sure. What yuh want to print it for, Ike? We ain't got no paper to waste."

"Magpie," says I, "a editor likes to see his stuff printed. I got a old piece of paper what will do for this."

Magpie sets the stuff in a little oblong affair, rolls on some ink, lays on the piece of paper, and twists down the handle. This is how she looks:

TAR ON TOMBSTONE

He was a bad man from Willer Crick,
On his birthday suit grows feathers thick.
Feathers and tar instead of a grave,
Mistook for an editor 'cause of a shave.

Magpie reads it all through. He sets down on a box, rolls a smoke, and reads it some more. He walks out to the door, looks around, and comes back.

"Who?" he asks.

"Paradise folks, Magpie."

"Did you see him in here?"

"Uh-huh. He was laying for us."

"Pshaw!"

Magpie takes his gun out and looks it over, sad-like. He stares at the door for a minute, and then—

"What's the notice on the door?"

He walks over and looks. Somebody has printed a notice and pinned it on that busted door, and she reads like this—

THIS PAPER HAS QUIT FOR KEEPS

I went back and got that can of ink, and a stick, and I signs it—

TOMBSTONE TODD

"What for, Ike?" asks Magpie. "What did he have to do with it?"

"Come back here, and I'll show yuh."

I takes him back to the table, and shows him a line of lead letters setting there on the table. It's the biggest in sight, and they reads:

EPITAF FOR MAGPY SIMPKIN. BRAVE
MEN AND DARN FULES DON'T SKARE.
HE WAS A DARN FULE MAY HE
REST IN PIECE

We walks almost to the door, when Magpie goes back and gets that stick and the can of ink.

"I'll give him all the credit coming to him, Ike," says he, and underneath Tombstone's name he prints—

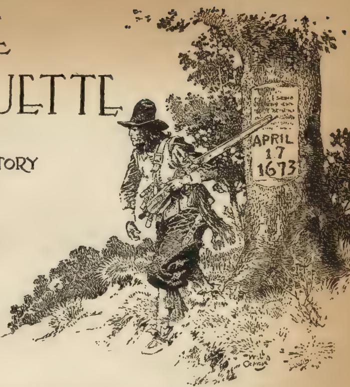
EDITOR PRO TEMPORE

BEFORE MARQUETTE

A THREE-PART STORY

-CONCLUSION-

by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton ~



Authors of "On Guard," "The White Indians," etc.

CHAPTER XII

THE ISLINOIS COLLECT

SINCE his arrival at the Misisepe River Dick had seen no indications of the presence of savages. The Ouisconsin apparently flowed through an unpeopled wilderness. So far as he had been able to discover the land lay empty.

His sudden resolution, his new determination to return to Virginia and make good his claim to this beautiful country for his own people, had completely occupied his mind for the moment. The new zeal burned fiercely and he had no thought except the hundreds of leagues he must put behind him in his new mission.

He half-fell down the very side of the great bluff, catching trees and saplings to steady himself, leaping over boulders, crashing through brush. When almost down he remembered what the three *coureurs de bois* had told him of a Jesuit priest named Jacques Marquette who was planning a journey to the mysterious Misisepe as soon as a representative of the French king should join him at Michilimakinac. The thought that they might arrive any day, might return first with news of their discovery, spurred him to fresh recklessness, and he dashed out into the open space at the foot of the bluff so swiftly he was carried to the water's edge by the impetus of his descent.

Intent only upon the need of speed if he were to make his return trip to Virginia before Fall, he wheeled at once toward the place where he had left his canoe.

Then for the first time he became aware that he was not alone. Between him and his craft stood forty or fifty savages, all of whom were regarding him with undisguised astonishment. Instantly he recognized them by their moccasins and weapons to be Islinois. And in the same instant he realized that he faced a danger to himself and its consequent defeat of his new purpose.

Quickly he searched the faces of the Indians, seeking one which might even resemble a victim of Pombert's treachery on the Islinois River. If he were known or suspected he knew that there was no hope, that his journey would end even before it began and his discovery of the "great water" would be valueless.

As Dick stood before the group of savages, studying each expressionless face for some sign of recognition or of hostility, his heart leaped at the thought that the Islinois were a people of scores of villages, that, men, women and children, they numbered more than a hundred thousand. The chances of these men coming from the distant village from which he and the three Frenchmen had escaped was slight. He was about to walk forward with his hands stretched out in a sign of friendliness when the group parted and a warrior stepped forth and faced his companions.

Immediately he began to speak, and so slowly that Dick had no difficulty in understanding him.

"This is one of the white men of whom we have heard," the savage began. "For many years there have come to us stories of these people with hairy faces who kill without arrows or clubs, who make many things of iron. The Outaouas and Hurons have traded with them since I was a child, but only the few of us who have gone north to the great lake at Chequamoigan have ever seen them.

"Last Summer, as you all know, four of these white men came to our country. They had canoes laden with things to trade, and they had much of the strong water that robs us of our senses. They met some of our people, far up our river, and after making them mad with the strong water they stole all they had. Some of our people in the next village were warned and the white men fled, leaving everything behind them.

"Because of the strong water our people fought and killed each other. They became mad, threw each other into the fire, set their homes ablaze, were worse than the beasts. None of us here was in that village but all of us have heard of what happened there. We have all sworn to have revenge, for even the goods that they left in their flight could not pay for the lives that were taken from us.

"This," and he pointed to Dick, "is one of their race. Few of them have dared venture so far from the great water to the east. This man might even be one of them. If he is, it is our duty to the Islinois to take him with us, to show him to the people of that village. Then we can have vengeance. If he is not we will not harm him, and we will give him presents and send him back to his own people with a warning of the wrath of the Islinois against all those who plunder and slay as did those four white men on the big river in our own country.

"We have heard that the white men are fair and generous, that they give fine presents and that their goods are such as we would like to have. We want to be friendly with the white people, but the honor of our nation will not permit us to submit to robbery and death. If good white men come we will welcome them, but we must make the white men understand now that we are not to be plundered."

Dick saw many nods of approval as the man, evidently a chief, finished speaking, and he knew that quick action was necessary if he were to thwart a procedure that meant certain death for him.

"I am pleased to hear so fair a speech from the men of the Islinois," he said as he stepped closer. "I am glad, too, that you have spoken so plainly about the four white men who plundered a village of your people. It is only just that such men should pay the penalty.

"White men are not all such as those who have visited you. There are people of your own race who do not always do right and the same is true of white men, for they are all children of the one Father. White men have a justice of their own that is bigger than the justice of your people. If a man does wrong we do not wait for the people of his victims to take revenge. He is punished if his crime is known.

"I know the four white men who violated your people last Summer."

There was an unconscious forward movement on the part of the savages at this announcement and their attention was complete.

"One of them himself drank of the strong water enough to loosen his tongue," Dick continued, "and he told of what they had done. Did the white men who heard him tell him he was brave? Did they give him presents because of his deed? I will tell you how they answered him."

Dick drew his hatchet from his belt and held it aloft dramatically.

"That hand, that arm, that hatchet," he exclaimed, "broke the head of the white man who plundered your people! He was the leader. The others were only his tools, as arrows in his hands. They ran into the forest and escaped. But he who led them against your people, who alone was responsible for their crime, was dead within seven days after he fled from your country."

The savages, easily swayed by eloquence, lovers of the dramatic, were profoundly impressed. They began to talk excitedly, and several made friendly advances. Only the man who had first spoken remained silent. He stood in front of Dick looking steadily and searchingly into the white man's eyes. His arms were folded across his bare chest and as the chatter behind him increased his brows contracted in a frown.

"I am glad to hear the words of the white man," he said as he waved his hand for silence. "If they are true words none could sound better. If they are not true our people are unavenged. I feel that they are true but I can not go back to my people and make them believe what I believe. They must hear the white man themselves or they will never know. If the white man's words are true he will receive many presents from my people. We will show him how many and how great we are and he will come to trade with us and get furs. We will take him with us to our country and give him presents and let him tell the people of the plundered village how he has avenged their wrongs."

An exclamation of approval broke from the savages and they began to press forward eagerly.

"But," protested Dick, "I must hurry back to my own country if I am to return before the snow comes with more goods. It is a journey of many moons."

"If the white man has spoken the truth he will have no fear to come among us, and we will pay him richly for his goods," said the chief with a gesture of finality.

DICK argued, protested, but the more he talked the deeper became the frown on the chief's face, the more open his suspicion. The Virginian saw his mistake. Then, too, he realized that there was a chance to escape before he reached the country of the Islinois, especially if he agreed to go willingly. These savages knew nothing of the use of canoes and with his birchbark craft he could outwit or outdistance them.

"I will go with the people of the Islinois," he announced. "I have nothing to fear. I would prefer to go among you with goods. But it shall be as you wish."

The savages proved very friendly but the chief never abandoned his suspicions and Dick was virtually a prisoner. After the Indian custom, he pretended to ignore this, acted as if he did not see the precautions taken to prevent his escape, and talked and joked with the various members of the party.

The savages were not on the war-path, as he had known when he first saw them, but the reason for their presence so far from their home was a mystery until, nearly a league farther up the river, the men were joined by their families, the women bearing heavy burdens, mostly of wild cattle skins and robes, leggings and various articles made from the hair of the animal.

Dick was not permitted to go alone in his canoe. Three men were placed in it with him, among them the chief, and when they reached a point opposite the broad plain on the east bank the craft was used to transport the entire party across the stream. This required two days, for the savages were not accustomed to the use of the canoe and the current often carried them far down before they could make a landing.

Once the band was across *cabines* were erected and then began for Dick the strangest scene he had ever witnessed. From up the river came a large brigade of canoes filled with people of the Ayoë nation. They had hardly made themselves at home before a still larger number of Nadouaissioux paddled down from the north, whole families crowded into smaller canoes than Dick had ever seen.

Mascoutens came down the Ouisconsin from the country near Lac Mecheygan, and, as the weeks slipped by, Saulteurs from the Lac Superior country. Kickapous journeyed up the Misisepe from the lower reaches of the Rocky River and strange tribes of which Dick had never heard drifted in from the west. A month after the arrival of the Islinois he estimated that nearly five thousand savages were encamped on the plain between the river and the bluffs.

As the number grew Dick began to dread each new arrival. Of all the people there he was by far the most conspicuous, the most talked of. Only a few of the savages had ever seen a white man and their interest was unending. Whenever a shout went up to signal the approach of a new band either by land or water, the Virginian made himself ready.

Should Ouinibegous venture so far to join the conglomerate gathering his situation would be serious. Should more Islinois come from the village the Frenchmen had attempted to plunder his fate would be sealed instantly. Should more Mascoutens paddle from the upper reaches of the Rock River he might be recognized and the Islinois' suspicions confirmed.

But by mid-May the last of the visitors seemed to have arrived. For a week no new bands came, and then Dick learned for the first time the reason for this strange gathering. The Nadouaissioux brought out wild rice and fine, dark furs and traded them for buffalo fat. The Ayoës depended entirely upon a large supply of soft, red stone in their bartering, and so great was the desire for this pipe material they reaped a large reward in copper from the Saulteurs and articles of European manufacture from the Mascoutens.

Each tribe came loaded with the products of its own particular country. Copper, paintstones, mica, soapstone, jade, flint, obsidian and shells were bartered in this strange mart. Clam shells from Dick's own Atlantic Ocean, quaintly fringed in beadwork, passed from hand to hand here on the banks of the great Misisepe and rivaled in popularity the obsidian which, the savages told him, came from some great mountains as far to the westward as the salt water lay to the east.

For each article in this strange collection there was a demand. Ayoës took salt-water shells with which to make beads in their homes far to the west. The Nadouaissioux were glad to get obsidian for the manufacture of spear and arrow heads and knives. The Islinois eagerly exchanged woven hair goods for copper. There was not a nation that did not have a want, nor a nation that could not fill it.

The ground upon which these distant peoples gathered was sacred to commerce. Even though nations might be at war there were no hostilities so long as they remained on the prairie between the hills and the great river at the mouth of the Ouisconsin. Distant tribes mingled freely, without fear and without suspicion. Ayoës with the red pipestone which could be obtained only in their country strolled into the *cabines* of Mascoutens and exchanged it for steel knives. Children of the Nadouaissioux romped with those of the Islinois. Kickapou boys shot blackbirds along the river banks in company with Saulteur youngsters.

The Mascoutens had several muskets and the Nadouaissioux boasted three or four weapons captured a year or two before from the Hurons, but they lacked powder for them. The Ayoës had never seen firearms before, nor the Islinois, and Dick made the most of his musket. The Islinois, as they saw the respect of the other nations for their guest, became very proud of him. Always he was asked to accompany them on their hunts for deer or the wild cattle, and the pride with which they afterward exhibited his game would have been laughable to Dick had it not been so valuable.

Feasts were given continually and in this, because of Dick's musket and his skill in hunting, the Islinois easily outdid all other nations. Their vanity, naturally great, seemed about to burst and the members of the tribe secretly discussed the power their great nation could wield were they only equipped with firearms. They questioned Dick as to the possibility of getting them and began to boast among themselves of their future prowess.

Their attitude troubled the Virginian for he had found them a kindly, generous, amiable people and he saw in this new arrogance and vanity the beginning of one of the terrible tribal wars. But he could not allow any interest in them to affect his chances for freedom and he established himself more firmly in their regard by readily promising the white man's weapons.

Everything that Dick did or said had behind it the one idea of escape. Daily he saw the fruits of his efforts in the added confidence with which the Islinois regarded him. Only the chief never abated his watchfulness. It was almost as though he had made himself responsible to the people of the plundered village for Dick's appearance. Always he saw to it that warriors were with him and at night a man sat at the door of the *cabine* in which Dick slept.

One thing, however, gave the Virginian hope. The gathering of the strange tribes would break up in a few days. Then, in the confusion of departure, he would grasp any opportunity. The day the Ayoës were preparing to leave he began to make definite plans.

But the Islinois, desirous of making one last impression on the assembled nations, had arranged a mammoth feast. A band of young men were sent to hunt deer and Dick could not afford to arouse their suspicions by refusing to accompany them. As usual he remained beside a gully while the savages drove the game toward him. In this way he had killed four deer by noon and the party moved over to another ravine. Beside the runway here they found six Nadouaissioux who were just about to drive the place for themselves.

The Islinois young men, insolent with the pride which had come to the whole band and confident in Dick's musket and their own superior numbers, ordered the Nadouaissioux out. The savages from the north refused and instantly the battle began. Dick attempted to prevent the attack, to make the Islinois see the unreasonableness of their demands. But his efforts were unavailing and in less than three minutes the six Nadouaissioux lay dead.

In the exaltation of this achievement the Islinois returned with their game and a story of how they had punished the insolent Nadouaissioux. They were reprimanded by the chief and cautioned to keep the affair secret. The feast was given that night and plans for the entire party to leave the next day were hurriedly made. Several Nadouaissioux had been invited and the Islinois watched them closely for signs that the loss of the hunters had become known. But the feast passed off without trouble and the Islinois, eager to be off, prepared to leave at dawn.

IN THE confusion resulting from the hurried flight Dick believed that at last his chance had come. The chief, however, detailed two men to guard him constantly. No loophole was offered, and in the morning the entire band, heavily loaded with the results of their bartering, began to cross the river. Arrangements had been made with the Mascoutens to aid with their canoes and in a short time the entire party was on the west bank.

The Islinois had kept a close watch on the Nadouaissioux but no signs of hostility or suspicion were detected. The Northern savages had even appeared to take little heed of the departure of the small band from the south.

Once across the river the Islinois proceeded down its western bank. The men aided with the burdens to make all possible haste. At night a strong guard was thrown out around their camp and early the second morning the march was resumed.

After three days all fear of pursuit was abandoned and they traveled more leisurely. In this reaction Dick hoped an opportunity for his escape might come, but the chief seemed rather to redouble his vigilance. In the manner of the savages he sought to give the impression that the Virginian was an honored guest, one in their care, and to be guarded constantly. Politely but brazenly he even insisted upon Dick relinquishing his musket at night, saying that the weapon was too precious to become the loot of a thieving Western Indian.

At the end of the fourth day camp was made in a ravine between two steep bluffs on the western shore. No one feared the Nadouaissioux so far to the south and no guards were thrown out. A couple of sentries in the camp itself were deemed sufficient.

It was then that the Nadouaissioux struck. In the first light of dawn, when sleep was soundest, as early as it was possible to distinguish friend from foe, the Northern warriors, who all the time had been ahead of the Islinois, passing them the first night in their canoes, stole close to the camp and completely surrounded it, taking every precaution to let no one escape.

So superior were they in numbers and so sudden and wholly unexpected was their attack, the Islinois were powerless. Those who did reach their feet and pick up their weapons were struck down at once. Fifteen of the forty men were killed and the others, seeing themselves at the mercy of the foe, surrendered.

The Nadouaissioux evidently had planned to capture Dick alive. His first knowledge of the raid was gained from a strong clasp on his ankles. He wakened to find a savage at each wrist and he lay there without struggling, watching the Northern Indians spread through the encampment, killing all those who offered resistance.

Five minutes after the attack began the victors were in complete control and Dick shuddered at what was to follow. Twenty-five men were prisoners and all the women and children of the party. There could only be torture for the first, slavery for the others. Dick's knowledge of savage warfare was extensive and he could conceive of no alternative.

The leader of the Nadouaissioux ordered that Dick be brought to him. He knew that the white man could speak both languages and he was asked to interpret. To Dick's complete amazement the chief began as follows:

"We learned before the feast given by the Islinois what their young men had done. When our hunters did not return we went to look for them and found their bodies and the footprints of the Islinois. And all the time we were eating of the meat of the Islinois we were thinking of their treachery and planning our revenge. For our duty was clear and, though we did not wish it and have had to travel far out of our way, we have come to avenge our dead. We did not intend even now to kill any of the Islinois. We have done so only when they took weapons against us. We want only the ten young men who murdered our hunters."

Dick translated this speech to the prisoners. They, too, were mystified by this leniency but instantly they grasped at the opportunity to escape. The men began at once to point out those who had taken part in the attack on the Nadouaissioux and as they did so the Northern warriors took them aside. Four were among the dead but the remaining six were closely guarded.

"Now," the Nadouaissioux chief said to Dick, "tell the people of the Islinois that they may go back to their country but that they are to tell their people that we are a mighty nation, that we desire to live at peace with our neighbors, but that treachery is never permitted to go unavenged."

Dick translated the speech and the Islinois, as if in a trance, prepared for their departure. The Virginian was equally dazed by this unheard of toleration on the part of a band of savages and as he began to see that it was real, sincere, not intended as a cloak to hide another attack, he imagined that his own opportunity had come. His canoe was at the river bank. The Islinois were forced to travel by land. By night he would be fifteen or twenty leagues in the lead and speeding toward Virginia.

In his eagerness to be off he turned to get his musket. The chief of the Nadouaissioux stepped in front of him, his hand upraised.

"The white man will come with our people," he said.

"But I had nothing to do with the killing of your young men," protested the Virginian. "I am not like the Islinois, who killed for the love of the killing."

"We know," answered the chief sternly, "that you were present at the slaughter of our hunters."

"Did you see the bodies?" asked Dick scornfully. "Did you find holes in them made by the white man's arrows?"

"We saw the bodies," answered the chief solemnly, "and we did not find holes made by the arrows of the white man. But we do not think the white man is a fool and a hatchet hangs from his belt."

Dick drew the little ax from its loop and handed it to the chief.

"Can you find blood upon it?" he demanded. "Did you see a mark on your dead that was not made by the war-clubs of the Islinois?"

"We only know that the white man was there," was the answer as the chief turned away to order his warriors to prepare for the journey to the prairie at the mouth of the Ouisconsin.

Dick was frantic in his despair. Not once during his captivity among the Islinois had he relinquished the thought of escape. Always he had planned on the moment when the vigilance of the chief would be relaxed, when his attention would be taken by other matters. Now when the moment had arrived there had come this new blow to his plans. It was unthinkable.

As he stood there, dazed by this new turn of affairs it was not fear that he felt but hot resentment that the decision of one petty chief of a band of savages should thus defeat the success of his great mision, should render impossible the gift that he could make to his own people.

The Nadouaissioux, he knew, lived far to the north, west of Lac Superior, far beyond the limits of the country known to the *coureurs de bois*. If he were to make his long journey to Virginia before Winter he must start at once. To go with this band to their home in the north meant, even should he escape later, that it would be impossible to reach Virginia before the Winter snows.

The knowledge threw Dick into a fresh rage and he ran after the chief to protest again. He argued, pleaded, threatened the wrath of the king of France, an avenging army of white men. But the Nadouaissioux only smiled. In the end Dick was forced into a canoe and the entire party started up-stream. Again Virginia faded into the distance.

CHAPTER XIII

THE EXECUTION

WHEN the Nadouaissioux war-party started northward on the Misisepe the Islinois prisoners were forced to do their share of the paddling. The Southern savages were so unskilful their captors laughed and jeered at their clumsy efforts. Dick, adept as he was in a canoe, escaped this but he marveled at the ability of the Northerners in handling their little craft. Only three or four men could find room in one, but they fairly lifted them from the water as they shot up-stream.

The mouth of the Ouisconsin was reached on the afternoon of the second day and the great prairie was found to be deserted by all except the families of the Nadouaissioux. The thousands of savages who had come for the annual bartering had dispersed to their homes and the Nadouaissioux themselves were ready for departure the next morning.

The desperate position in which Dick found himself drove him to renew his protests against being carried away with them, although before he began he felt the futility of his words. This time he did not plead or threaten. Rather he argued with all the eloquence at his command.

He pointed out that the French, of whom they believed him one, would surely hear of this action and that no traders would dare to venture among them and carry to them the white man's weapons, for which they were so desirous. He felt that he scored here but, although he watched their faces closely, he was unable to learn anything as to the weight of his argument. They met this as they had all else that he had said in silence, a silence that was maddening because it told nothing.

His failure even to elicit a reply convinced the Virginian that success must lie in his ability to slip away, to steal a canoe and paddle down the Misisepe. The attitude of the Nadouaissioux encouraged him in this, for while daylight lasted at the bartering-place there were no guards appointed. To all outward appearances the prisoners could go and come as they pleased, though none was unwise enough to wander far from the center of the camp. Every woman and child was in reality a watchful sentry and a hundred warriors would respond instantly to the first alarm.

With the coming of darkness all opportunity of escape vanished, however. Dick and the six other prisoners were placed in a *cabine* and a dozen armed warriors took up their station outside.

The Islinois apparently went to sleep instantly, but Dick lay awake for a long time. Now that he realized that escape was hopeless for the present he reviewed the situation more carefully. From the direction in which the Misisepe flowed and from the information he had received from the savages and Antoine Goddin, he believed that the Ohio of the Iroquois joined the "great water" not far from the place where he had left it on his journey from Virginia. This convinced him that the best way back to the colony was to go down the Misisepe until he came to the Ohio, then eastward on the route by which he had come.

If his deductions were correct only three or four months would be ample for the journey, provided always that he met no hostile nations and was not made prisoner again. It was now the first of June. He would dare start as late as the first of August. That would give him two months in which to make good his escape.

The knowledge brought relief from the first incoherent feeling of the need of desperate haste. Now he could plan carefully, calmly, and, he told himself, successfully. When the two months were up, or before, he resolved that he would be on his way to Virginia to do the thing he had promised himself that he would do.

With these two months in view he laid his plans. He would appear to submit to his captivity among the Nadouaissioux. This alone would not deceive them and he must find some method of convincing the savages that he had no desire to leave. Even if he journeyed far north with them they undoubtedly would remain on or near the Misisepe and, down-stream, he could quickly regain the lost ground.

Dick was not foolish enough to announce his submission at once. Only by his manner did he appear content to start northward the next morning. He took his place in his own canoe, paddled as hard as any of the women, and even sang a song or two as he toiled. The Nadouaissioux did not ill-treat their prisoners but that the deaths of the young men were not being forgotten was evident in the almost continuous weeping.

In fact, when camp was made, weeping, Dick believed, was the principal occupation of men, women and children. Culinary duties were neglected the first night while the whole band shed tears. Never before had Dick seen more or greater expressions of sorrow, and his own heart was moved until he heard one warrior, whose eyes were fairly raining tears, relate a humorous story of the bartering-place.

Even the Islinois, who could speak only with Dick because of the complete dissimilarity of the languages, were struck by this ability to shed tears at will. But more than anything else the Southern savages spoke of the toleration of their captors and, after the second day of the northward journey they all began to share the hope that they might be held as slaves and adopted into the nation.

The evening of the third day the canoes reached a second prairie on the east bank of the river, one fully as large as that just above the mouth of the Ouisconsin. The great bluffs continued on either side, though here for the first time a valley stretched away to the eastward between the hills and a small river flowed in to join the Misisepe. Here the party camped for the night.

The next morning Dick found that the Nadouaissioux were not preparing to depart. The weeping habit had been revived and when he left the *cabine* in which he had slept the entire band was shedding tears. The kindly attitude of the savages had vanished, too, and as Dick started to walk away one of the guards thrust him back through the door. A few minutes later all seven prisoners were marched forth and, surrounded by the guards and followed by the entire band, led to a grove of trees near the river bank. There the chief made a speech which he asked Dick to translate to the Islinois.

"Six of our hunters were slain by the people of the Islinois and the white man who was with them," he began. "Our young men were hunting the deer, with no thought of war or murder. Our people went to the bartering-place with no evil thoughts for any other people. We kept the truce which has existed on the prairie at the Rivers Ouisconsin and Misisepe ever since our oldest men can remember. Never have we molested our deadliest foes while gathered there.

"The young men of the Islinois forgot their duty, their reverence for the spirits that guard the place. Without cause they slew our young men.

"There have come to us stories of how the people living far to the east near the stinking water take prisoners and tie them to stakes, how they burn and slash them, cut off their noses and ears, hold hot stones to their breasts, gouge out their eyes, thrust splinters of pine into their flesh and set them afire. We have heard that they tie them to stakes in the ground and roast off their feet and legs, that they tear out their finger-nails, that they butcher them as they never would butcher the wild cattle or the deer or the moose.

"All these ways are strange to our people. We find no pleasure in them. We live peaceably among ourselves and our neighbors. But we are not a timid race."

He waited for Dick to tell the Islinois what he had said and then continued:

"In a war we are not afraid to fight, as our enemies have learned, but once we have won we are generous. We like to show that, though we are victors, we bear no ill-will toward the vanquished. It is even the custom of our people when we are at war with another nation and take prisoners to send them back to their own people."

HE PAUSED and nodded toward Dick, who repeated his words to the other prisoners. The Virginian spoke as fully as the chief, even added a few words because of his own dawning hope that after all they were to be released. The temperate words and even tone of the chief were inexplicable in the light of what Dick knew of savage revenge and savage torture.

But Antoine Goddin had told him that the Sioux were unlike any other savage nation. Their leniency toward the band of Islinois, their treatment of prisoners and now the magnanimous tone of the chief, all confirmed this report, and in the face of it all Dick could only conclude that they neither wished nor intended to detain him longer.

When he had translated, the chief continued:

"We are now three days' journey from the prairie where all the nations barter each year. We are approaching our own country, even now are on its borders. We have with us the six Islinois and the white man who killed our young men. They killed them, not in war but with evil minds and for an evil purpose. Under such conditions it is our duty as well as our desire that they die. We do not wish that they die as do the prisoners of the nations to the east. We are brave enough without eating their hearts and drinking their blood to add to our own courage. But they must die as is the custom of our people."

Dick, his face pale, his eyes staring, was too stunned by this announcement to turn away from the chief. The instant before he had seen liberty, a quick departure. Now he stood face to face with death.

"Is the white man afraid to die for the deaths he caused?" asked the chief scornfully. "Is his heart as white as his skin?"

Dick's fear was not so much for himself, though he was young and death could never come easily. But his soul rebelled at this blasting of his hopes, at a fate which hinged so great an enterprise upon so inconsequential a thing.

Partly in English, partly in Nadouaissioux, he protested his innocence, stormed against the injustice of their action, threatened with the direst consequences his imagination could arouse.

But even as he raved and swore in the face of the chief and the leading men of the band who were gathered before him he read the uselessness of his words.

"The white man talks in vain," interrupted the chief sharply.

As Dick, inarticulate, with working lips and dazed brain, stood staring at the savages the death scene of Antoine Goddin came to him as if it were a vision, as if a spirit had suddenly appeared to rebuke him. He saw the bank of the Ouisconsin where his friend had died, saw him lying there at the foot of the great oak, his face calm, his eyes brave to the end.

The Frenchman's words returned with all their simple courage. Antoine had played a dangerous game in a far land. He had weighed his chances, taken his risks, that the great object might be obtained. He had died like a man dies when he knows that the balance has swung the other way and the lips that had finally closed were curseless.

Dick recoiled before a comparison of the Frenchman's words and actions and his own. If he, too, must relinquish his work to those who would follow, at least he could do it with the same quiet courage. He turned suddenly to the waiting Islinois. Head up, eyes bright and steady, his voice clear and unfaltering, he repeated the last words of the chief's message and then faced the Nadouaissioux to await the end.

Immediately one of the Islinois was led away from the others and tied to a tree. Before him all the boys of the village lined up, their bows drawn, arrows in place. No sooner had the guards stepped back than the flint-tipped shafts were drawn. There was a twanging of bow strings. The next moment a hail of arrows struck the prisoner.

Like a human porcupine he stood there, arrows impaled in every part of his chest, abdomen and arms. But he still lived, for the boys' arms had not been strong enough. Almost instantly, however, other arrows had been fitted to the bows and a second flight clattered among the shafts already imbedded. The body of the prisoner sagged in its bonds and his head fell forward. Several warriors ran up and cut the dead man loose. The body was thrown into the river.

A second Islinois was bound to the tree and he, too, lived until the second flight of arrows.

The third walked up proudly and was rewarded by a bit of flint entering his eye and piercing his brain, bringing instant death. The boy who had fired the arrow ran forward and drew it out with a shrill cry, and there were grunts of approval from the warriors.

The boys of the band were now hysterical in their excitement and danced impatiently while the fourth victim was led out. They selected their arrows with care and crowded each other to get the most advantageous positions. As a result of their excitement the Islinois did not die until the fourth volley and more than a hundred and fifty shafts were imbedded in his flesh. His bonds were cut and he fell forward, driving a score of arrows entirely through his body.

Dick, the spell of Goddin's death scene still upon him, stood calmly in his place.

He watched each successive victim as he was led forward, saw the swift flight of the arrows, heard the body splash into the waters of the great river.

The fifth Islinois died with the third flight of arrows from the boys and only one remained before Dick's turn would come, for they were evidently holding him for the last. The sixth was led forward and one youngster, edging ahead of the others and not waiting until the guards had retreated from the tree, let fly an arrow which cleanly entered the victim's mouth.

A roar of laughter swept over the men and women and the other boys, incensed that one of their number had taken an advantage, fell to arguing among themselves. Laughter convulsed the savages as they stared at the victim, a shaft protruding from his mouth, a thin line of blood running down his chin.

At last, one by one, then two and three at a time, the boys began drawing their bows again. There was a twang, a slight hiss as the feathered shaft twisted in its flight and, miraculously it seemed, another arrow suddenly appeared in the prisoner's flesh.

Quickly the number increased. Blood drenched the savage's naked chest and ran in streams down his legs. He stood there, head erect, eyes unblinking, and still the bows twanged until it seemed that there was not room for another arrow above his waist. Then simultaneously two shafts struck his eyes and his head fell forward.

Beginning with the laughter over the first arrow protruding from the man's mouth and the excitement and quarrel of the youthful executioners, the slow death of the last of the Islinois had wrought up the entire band. Men and women shrieked and yelled and danced about, but the instant the prisoner was killed everything was quiet.

Dick, fascinated by the spectacle, was the last to realize the sudden stillness and as he looked around he found every person staring at him. The boys, nervous, eager, were fitting their best arrows to their bows.

CHAPTER XIV

A NADOUAISSIOUX

FOR a moment Dick had the impulse to turn upon his captors, to attack his guards barehanded, to run amuck among them and compel a quick death. It was not that he believed he might escape, that he might compel acknowledgment of his courage. It was simply the white man's way to die. The savage is schooled through the generations to die haughtily, even at the stake. The white man must go out in a blaze of fierce endeavor and action.

Even as he turned and saw that he could easily grasp the war club of a man near him he knew that he would not try. He had chosen a life among the savages, had chosen to play their game. He would follow it to the end and die according to their custom. Though he were white, he could do no more here than die as dies the savage.

In the silence that had descended upon the crowd the young Virginian turned toward the guards and held out his hands. They stepped toward him, grasped his wrists and led him to the tree.

The boys, their youthful minds inflamed during the execution of the six Islinois, hysterical even in the unusual excitement, were silent and nervous while the white man was bound. Here was unknown game. Here was flesh their flint and obsidian had never penetrated. Here was a representative of that unknown and mysterious race who drove their arrows with thunder, who made keen tools of iron, and who came from a marvelous land far beyond the stinking water.

The youngsters did not falter, did not shrink from the task before them, but their bows trembled and there was an unnatural stiffness in their bearing as they stood ready.

In that nervous condition Dick saw that what he most dreaded would be inevitable. If the boys were cool and unexcited death would be quick. In their present state the prolonged agony of the Islinois would be nothing with what he must suffer. The thought of numberless arrows sticking into his flesh, none with force enough to bring the end, was maddening, and impulsively he began to speak.

"Listen!" he called in a loud voice.

The half-drawn bows of the boys straightened. There was a quick movement of the crowd toward him.

"Though I am a white man I can die as well as can your own people," the Virginian said. "But I have lived as a man and I wish to die as a man. When I fought I fought as a man, in the open, face to face with my enemy. That is the way the white man wants to die, facing his enemy, not a crowd of children with their child's weapons.

"You are not my enemies. I have never harmed you. But you think I have and you are going to kill me. You are a big people and a just people, slow to anger, and I know that you will grant the wish of a man who is about to die."

"What is the white man's wish?" asked the chief when Dick paused.

"Send those children to their mothers' skirts!" he cried fiercely. "Put men in their places. Let men's bows be drawn, not bows that are used to kill blackbirds along the river. That is what I ask."

It was a demand rather than a request. Its effect was apparent. The men began to speak in whispers among themselves. The chief waved the boys back. The warriors seemed naturally to form a large circle. Several began preparations to make speeches, but an old man, stiff from years of hunting and fighting and exposure, stepped forward and began to address them.

"You all know me," he said. "You all know that my loss in the treachery of the Islinois was double that of any one else. You know that my two sons, the only children I had, the only support of an old man and their mother, were killed. You know that I face my old age without the comfort and care of children, that I am doomed to loneliness and sorrow until the end. I am like the broken reed in the river in the moon of the rut of the moose. The winds and the currents have their will with me. I am too weak to hold against them.

"The white man we hold as prisoner was present when my sons were killed by the treacherous Islinois. He says he tried to prevent the murder. From his actions today I would believe him. But, whether he is guilty or not, he was there. He was with the Islinois, came to the bartering-place with them, was with the hunting-party that brought so much sorrow to us.

"The white man has shown himself to be brave. He has looked upon death with steady eyes and firm lips. He has shown that he can die as we would all like to die.

"He has the bow that kills with thunder arrows. He has a hatchet and knife of iron, while we have only stone. He can paddle and he can hunt.

"My people, I want this young man for a son. I need him to provide for me in my old age, to kill moose and beaver that I may not starve, to bring skins that I may not freeze. I wish to take him into my home, to call him son and have him call me father. The white man and the Islinois robbed me of all that I have. Let them give back what they can."

As the old man took his seat in the circle and the customary silence ensued, Dick looked eagerly at the faces of the warriors. He knew the savages often adopted prisoners into their own families to take the places of those slain in war. The Iroquois had kept their ranks full by adopting entire tribes.

But what gave him the greatest hope was the fact that a prisoner thus adopted never endeavors to return to his own people. It is the accepted belief that he has died, that his former existence has ended and that into his body has come the spirit of the slain warrior whose place he takes. Once adopted, Dick knew that the Nadouaissioux would not question his acceptance of the savage theory but would treat him immediately as one of the band, would permit him to go and come as he pleased. And that would mean Virginia before the Winter snows.

Other warriors, leaders in the band, arose and spoke briefly. Dick, straining against his bonds, listened eagerly to every word. Not one showed a desire to thwart the request of the old man. Only additional reasons for the adoption of the captive were proposed.

At the end the chief nodded and several young men ran to the tree to sever the thongs that bound the Virginian to it. He was escorted into the circle and formally presented to the father whose sons had been slain. And so, with a few simple ceremonies and much smoking of the calumet, Dick Jeffreys became a Nadouaissioux.

In the three days that the band remained on the prairie the Virginian devoted himself to establishing firmly the belief that he had taken the place of the sons who were slain. The morning after the execution of the Islinois he went off early with his musket, and alone. He crossed the prairie to a great, rock-crowned bluff and followed its base into the valley which opened to the east.

He went on into this for more than a league and, by sheer luck, encountered a small herd of wild cattle in a wooded valley. He crept close, killed a huge bull at the first shot and loaded again in time to kill another before the herd stampeded. Then, loading as he ran, he climbed the side and met the galloping animals face to face as they rounded the end of the ridge. A third went down and, before the last were out of range, a fourth was mortally wounded.

The buffalo had turned toward the west and as Dick made his way back to the encampment he encountered them again, getting two more and finishing the one he had wounded. He then hurried back to the savages and asked that the women be sent out after the meat. At night, when they returned, a hundred of them each carrying all the meat her strength permitted, the camp was in an uproar. In the feast that followed Dick was accorded the place of honor.

The band moved on up the river. Once they found a herd of buffalo swimming the stream and again Dick's musket won respect. The grief-stricken father who had adopted him strutted about the camp and boasted of his son's prowess. The boys who would have slain him a few days before followed him in awe. The old men of the band accorded his every word their closest attention. His counsel was invited and respected.

DICK did not overlook any opportunities to cement his hold upon the Nadouaissioux. He found them entirely different from any savages he had ever encountered. They were mild, pleasant, amiable people. The men were tall and well formed, though the women were more ugly than is usually the case with savages. Every member of the band, even to the infants, began the day with a bath in the river.

The Virginian easily fell into their mode of life, quickly adopted all their customs, established the best of terms with the men, and in a week he was, to all outward appearances, a savage.

Yet not once in all that time did he forget the one thing that prompted these actions. He studied the canoes, which were smaller and lighter than his own and better adapted to his long journey. He even chose the one he would take when he made his dash to the southward.

He strolled about the camp after dark, learning the habits of the various individual members of the band, noting the hour when they retired, marking down those who were prone to sit late about a fire and gossip. He made friends with the numberless dogs of the encampment, surreptitiously tossed them pieces of meat and then tested them by walking through the camp at night.

He was up at dawn, watching to see which members of the band were the earliest risers. When he had learned who each was he began to express a choice in the location of his own *cabine* at night that, when he had gone, his absence might be discovered as late as possible.

A week after he had been adopted Dick decided that the first cloudy night would suffice for his attempt. Every detail which could insure success had been planned. He had secreted a supply of dried meat and wild oats on the bank to be picked up on his return, had chosen two good paddles, and selected a small, narrow canoe capable of unusual speed.

The morning of the eighth day after his adoption the band began its leisurely journey northward in a fine drizzle. The low clouds drifted before a south wind. There was every indication that they would hang low through the night at least. Dick recognized his chance and resolved to take it. In that swift current he could travel twenty-four hours a day, sleeping in the bottom of the canoe as he had done on the Ouisconsin.

He should gain at least twelve hours' start, perhaps more, and in that twelve hours he could gain twenty-five leagues. His pursuers, when they came, would travel faster, but his experience with the Ouinibegous had given him confidence and he knew that the Nadouaissioux would not dare venture too far south for fear of the Islinois.

As Dick, paddling unconsciously, went over and over his plans the leading canoes passed out of sight around a bend. When he suddenly became aware of his surroundings he found that, less than an hour after the start, the fleet of birchbarks had strung out along the shore of a large lake.

With the south wind helping, the Nadouaissioux made all possible speed. The lake was more than ten leagues long, Dick was told, and the high bluffs on either side were the home of fierce winds that always lay in wait for the savages that they might devour the canoes. Men, women and children showed their fear by paddling swiftly. It seemed to be the desire of every one to cross the lake as quickly as possible.

Half a league out Dick found to his dismay that the current had ceased. The lake was only an enlargement of the great stream, but it was a lake. Should the south wind hold he could make no more than a league an hour against it. The great lead he had counted upon would be cut in half. He might not be able even to get off the lake before he would be seen.

Though he cursed himself for not having begun his dash the night before, for not having made inquiries as to the route ahead, there was nothing to do except go on. He was trapped and all he could hope for was a fiercer wind that would drive the savages to camp on the western shore. Then, with only a small stretch of the lake between him and the river, he could get away.

The wind did increase, driving the canoes before it, sending the water swishing and surging alongside in curling rollers. Dick's heart leaped at each successive blast, but the savages kept on, paddling harder, shouting hopefully to one another. A race was on, a race between the wind and mounting seas and the canoes, with the finish line a point setting out from the western shore, around which there would be shelter.

Dick kept on with the others, his foster-parents paddling with amazing strength, looking anxiously over their shoulders at the storm clouds behind them. Dick prayed that they would lose, begrudged each league that slipped behind them, was incensed that the wind did not make further progress too dangerous. He began to see that the entire success of his plan depended upon being driven ashore before the shelter of the distant point was reached.

But the wind settled to a steady blow, the little canoes rose and fell with the rollers in safety, and at noon the entire fleet had rounded the point and stopped to rest in its shelter. From the point Dick could see the end of the lake about three leagues to the northwest, across a broad expanse of water. The lake would require a whole night's strenuous paddling under favorable conditions, he estimated, and if the wind kept up he could not hope to get out of sight.

The savages, after a rest, started on. They kept close to the west shore, out of the wind, but each member of the band had a watchful eye on the clouds. Their fear of the lake and the storms that swept it kept them working steadily and when sunset came they had reached the mouth of the river.

The land was low, swampy, the stream divided into many channels, and as the great fleet left the lake it separated into three divisions. Dick and his foster-parents were with a score of canoes that entered a swift, narrow place bordered by high rushes. Tired by their strenuous exertions since morning, they made headway with difficulty. The channel narrowed, the current became more swift, dusk was settling over the water.

Then suddenly out of the reeds on either side darted a flotilla of small canoes, each manned by four naked, painted, whooping savages.

Arrows fairly rained upon the Nadouaissioux. Many were wounded. Paddles dropped from nerveless hands and floated off down-stream. One canoe overturned and the heads of children bobbed in the current. Shrill yells came across the marshes, indicating that the attack was simultaneous in all the channels.

As Dick saw the canoes dash out from both sides his first thought was to flee. Whoever the attackers were, it was not his battle. But before he could turn his craft the enemy were among the Nadouaissioux and war-clubs were swinging right and left. One canoe dashed straight toward Dick's and he laid aside his paddle for his musket and fired into the face of the leading savage just as he was about to brain his foster-mother.

The two canoes swung together broadside. A war-club crashed into the skull of Dick's foster-father. The Virginian whirled his musket and knocked the second savage into the water, but before he could recover his balance the third brought down his club.

Dick swerved, it caught him a glancing blow on the side of the head, and he fell unconscious upon the body of the old Nadouaissioux.

CHAPTER XV

THE PROMISE

THE war-party of the Otjibwa, known to the French as the Saulteurs because they were first found at the Sault Ste. Marie, numbered less than half as many men as the Nadouaissioux, but their attack was so sudden and so wholly unexpected, and the Nadouaissioux were at such a disadvantage, the slaughter was terrific for a time. The savages from Lac Superior cracked heads wherever they showed, male, female or infant, and the early darkness alone saved their victims from complete annihilation.

That Dick Jeffreys lived was due to the quick wit of his foster-mother. The canoes of the attacking party had swept past when she found herself alone in the bow of their craft and she immediately turned, drove across the current and hid in the reeds. Sounds of the battle came from downstream and both sides but soon died away as the current swept every one out into the lake. The old woman judged that none remained between her and the upper river and stealthily she shoved out and began to paddle northward.

The clouds were low, the darkness intense. The river mouth was a vast marsh. High reeds bordered the narrow channels and islands were numerous. The old woman knew every nook of the river and in two hours she had traveled so far from the lake she dared go ashore and ascertain if her men were dead or only wounded. She turned her canoe into a tree-roofed slough and crept forward to feel of their bodies. Dick was breathing, but her husband's hands were cold and blood no longer flowed from his crushed head.

As she knelt over them she heard the swish of water behind her and saw the dark shadow of a canoe against the brighter river. As she watched, another and another passed, stealthily, like ghosts, and she knew that her people were retreating in the darkness. She pushed out into the stream and all night toiled with the others against the current.

Dawn found their paddles still plying steadily and they did not stop until they were a league beyond a river flowing into the Misisepe from the north, the route by which the attackers had come. The entire party, numbering only a pitiful dozen canoes hid in a slough while three unwounded warriors in a single canoe went on to warn the great body of their people, who, they knew, would be camped at the big falls of the great river.

Dick's foster-mother, weary as she was, did all she could do for the wounded man. She removed the body of her husband and made a soft bed for the Virginian in the bottom of the canoe. She felt of the great welt on the side of his head, pressed against the skull and grunted with satisfaction on finding that it had not been crushed. She washed the blood from his head and neck, bathed his face and crooned over him in an effort to bring him to consciousness.

But the hours went by and the Virginian lay in the bottom of the canoe, his face white, his eyes closed, his chest rising and falling only slightly and with ominous pauses between.

Later in the afternoon a boy stationed on the bank of the main channel reported that the warriors were passing and the fugitives paddled out of their hiding-place to see a hundred canoes, each driven by four men, speeding down with the current to cut off the Saulteurs and avenge the deaths of their people.

Dick's foster-mother toiled the remainder of the day to traverse the six leagues remaining before the main encampment of her people was reached and then, exhausted, she turned her patient over to others.

The morning of the second day Dick opened his eyes for the first time. He was too weak to move and he believed at first that the thunder in his ears was due to his injury, for in all his travels on the Misisepe he had not found even a rapids. He was lying in a bark *cabine*, alone, but soon his foster-mother entered, to retreat at once with loud shouts of joy that brought a crowd to the door. Broth was poured between his lips, his face and head bathed, and he dropped off to sleep.

The recovery of the Virginian was a matter of weeks, not days. Willing hands bore him each morning to the trees above the great falls, which Frenchmen were to see a few years later and name St. Anthony. Women brought him food, the choicest parts of the game. Old men came and sat beside him, smoking for hours in absolute silence if he showed no desire for conversation.

The war-party returned with a score of prisoners and long tales of vengeance. The Saulteurs had been dispersed, some fleeing into the forest, others down the river, all cut off for the time from their own country to the northeast.

Again Dick was amazed at the tolerance of the Nadouaissioux. Ten prisoners were executed as had been the Islinois. The others, after witnessing the execution, were set free and told to report to their people that the Nadouaissioux had not sought war, that they desired peace with the Saulteurs, but that their neighbors were guilty of the foulest treachery and would be exterminated if ever again they committed such an act.

The methods of torture Dick had seen to the eastward, and which he believed were practised by all savages, were unknown among the Nadouaissioux. It was a custom to be adopted later, after the effects of the Iroquois raids had been felt in the valley of the Misisepe.

Yet the people with whom Dick found himself called themselves Poualaks, or "warriors," the name Nadouaissioux, meaning "a snake," or "enemy," having been given them by the Saulteurs. The French soon reduced this to Sioux, and the amiable, brave, honest people who spread from the Misisepe to the great mountains to the west, those who spared their prisoners and wept copiously at will, were the ancestors of the followers of Sitting Bull.

Dick believed his recovery would be short. Virginia was ever in his mind. July had come but there was still time for him to escape for his dash of several hundred leagues down the great river. But a week after he arrived at the falls he discovered that his right side was partially paralyzed. Sometimes he could move his right arm or leg but he never could be certain. A day might go by without his being able to walk.

At first this brought a greater despondency than at any time since the death of Antoine Goddin. There was a chance when he had been captured by the Islinois, still a chance when he was bound to the tree before the Nadouaissioux boys. Now he saw none. A thousand leagues of unknown wilderness lay between him and his destination, a thousand leagues of paddling, portaging, hunting his living, dodging hostile savages, finding his way. Not only a stout heart but a whole body was necessary, and he could not even swing a paddle, could not lift his musket to his shoulder, could not be certain but that the next step would topple him to the ground.

It was maddening, and for the first time Dick refused, even after days of contemplation, to accept his fate without bitterness. Savages he could fight or outwit, strange waters could be navigated, trackless forests could be traversed, but this was something wholly beyond his power to combat. Idle, chafing, cursing each day that found him still at the falls, he saw July pass. There was no improvement. The blow on the left side of his head had injured his brain or certain nerve-centers, and he saw a lifetime of hobbling, crawling beggary among savages who, as time passed, would lose their awe for his color, would forget that he had killed two of the Saulteurs in their disastrous battle down the Misisepe.

The first of August nearly all the people gathered at the great falls began to depart for their Winter home among the innumerable lakes at the source of the Misisepe. There, among the wild oats marshes, secure from attack and provided with grain and beaver and moose for the Winter, they would remain until the following Spring.

There was nothing for Dick but to accompany them. His foster-mother paddled him, he hobbled or crawled across portages. Warriors gave them of their game, were glad of the honor of carrying his musket. Some insinuated that Dick should teach them its use and give them powder and balls, but he had only a small amount of ammunition and even in the face of this last disaster he could not give up all hope that some day he might recover and start back to Virginia.

It was on this journey to the Winter home of the Nadouaissioux that peace was arranged with the Saulteurs. Dick had heard of the power of the calumet, had seen the reverence in which the Islinois held it, had been told by Goddin of its might among all the Western tribes. The Sioux especially kept all sworn promises with an inviolable fidelity and the ceremony of the calumet meant that absolute trust could be placed upon them.

The calumet itself, originally a stick of wood two or three feet long, a quarter of an inch thick and two inches wide, pierced from end to end so that the breath or spirit might pass through it, had, in Dick's time, a bowl at one end in which to smoke the sacred tobacco. The whole affair was usually gorgeously decorated and many of the tribes knew and practised a dance and chant in honor of the calumet itself.

Since Dick had become a Nadouaissioux and had gained the confidence of the older men of the tribe, they often talked to him of the calumet and its power. It could be used in all things, as a passport to distant tribes, to ratify peace pacts or treaties, to secure good weather, to bring rain, to attest contracts and to declare war.

BUT not until he witnessed the treaty with the Saulteurs had he realized the really impressive ceremonies with which it could be smoked. For this was its most important use. Dick was accorded a seat in the front circle of warriors and as he watched the chiefs of the two nations gravely blowing the smoke toward the sky, the four world quarters and the earth, earnestly invoking the sun and other spirits as witnesses to their vows of "sacred kinship," he could not but be impressed by the sincerity of the participants.

Through September the savages were busy with the harvest of wild oats. Huge quantities were gathered in the great marshes and put away for Winter. The women worked from morning to night, driving their canoes through the tall stalks and beating the kernels into the bottom with short sticks. The wild oats marshes were the property of the Sioux and even then were becoming a bone of contention with the Salteurs and starting a warfare that was to last through nearly two centuries.

With the first snows of Fall Dick discovered that his paralysis was leaving him. Daily he began to have more and more use of his right arm and right leg. A fierce exaltation seized him. Each morning he tested his limbs, tried to walk, to lift things. If he were able to get away before the first ice in the lakes could reach the swift current of the Misisepe, he could keep ahead of Winter in its southward rush, could at least reach the Ohio before frost closed the waterways. That would be half his journey and he would risk the danger and privation of the rest. Before Spring Virginia would have the news of his discovery.

But he was too eager, pressed his recovery too hard. His nerves ceased entirely to function and, shivering, despondent, he lay beside the fire in the birchbark *cabine* as Winter gripped the Northern land.

It was then that Dick Jeffreys for the first time thought of other things in Virginia than his mission and Governor Berkeley. With the savages there had been constant human contact but never human fellowship. The oil was stirred into the water but never merged with it, never could be absorbed. Ever since the death of Antoine Goddin Dick had felt a void which even his breathless impatience to return to Virginia could not entirely fill.

Now, lying beside a small fire in a low, evil-smelling *cabine*, shut in by the fierce Winter of the North, despondent, comfortless, his mind turned to the people of Virginia. There was his father, alone like himself, with even a deeper personal sorrow, perhaps mortally wounded by what he would consider as the complete disgrace of his son. There was Elizabeth Carver, Betsykins, the one person in the colony who had been a real companion, who had more nearly understood him, and she, like his father, had been left with a great misunderstanding, had in the end been deprived even of that wonderful faith in him.

Dick sometimes marveled at this trust of the girl, whom he still considered, as he had that last night under the sycamores as a romping, boyish, carefree comrade. Even now he failed to understand how he had hurt her in that last interview, still believed it was his irreverence for kings that had shocked her royalist ears.

In his foster-mother alone did Dick find comfort. Like many Indian women who have passed middle age, who have seen Winters and famines and wars come and go, leaving their trail of suffering and sorrow and death, she was a strong, noble, virile character. Though the Nadouaissioux did not accord their women a high place, she had won to a certain influence through the sheer dominance of her will, her keen intellect and her biting tongue which were, in fact, the only qualities of leadership possessed even by the men.

Her sharp comments, her shrewd deductions, her knowledge of savage nature, expressed openly or in long conversations with the leading men, had resulted in her wielding a power in the band that was not second even to the chief's. The deaths of her two sons and husband had brought a certain bitterness, a vindictiveness that had won advantageous terms in the treaty with the Saulteurs, but it had also, in her loneliness, brought a great affection for the white man who had become her son. On Dick she lavished her tenderness, that mother love which is so often consuming among savage people, and, in time, her quick intuition and shrewd observation led to a discovery of his ambitions and hopes.

"Your body is here but your heart is not," she said to him one night as they sat beside the fire. "Our people can become the children of another nation when adopted. But the white man can not change his heart any more than he can change his skin."

Dick did not reply. He had a certain fondness for the old woman, a great respect, but he did not know that he could confide in her.

"You can trust me," she uncannily answered his thought. "I am your mother, and I know my son."

Dick looked at the wrinkled, dark-skinned face with the straight black hair brushed back from a low forehead. In the hard-pressed mouth, the thick nose the expression that always was stern and forbidding, he found nothing assuring. But in the eyes, black, unwavering, he found truth, the mother love, a real tenderness that belied the stern features.

"You are right, mother," he answered impulsively. "I am not happy here. I can not be. You have been as kind to me as your own flesh and blood. Your people have been brothers. I should not ask more.

"But," and his eyes glowed as he sat up and faced her across the fire, "my heart can never be here. It is in the place where I was born, where I have always lived, where my father, white-haired, sorrowing, waits for me. My land is far away and I would have been there now had not the Islinois falsely accused me and taken me prisoner. I must go back to my home, mother. I must go."

The old woman studied him shrewdly for a moment.

"There is a woman," she said at last. "You have not cared for the young women of our people."

"No, there is none," answered Dick earnestly. "It is because I love my land and my people and because I can not be happy away from them."

For a long time she sat looking into the fire. The flickering blaze enhanced the savagery of her features. Her brown, knotted, toil-cramped hands were clasped about her knees. Her eyes stared, unwavering, unblinking, complete masks for her thoughts.

"My son," she said at last, "you have not told me all. It is not a woman, for a woman brings another light to a man's eyes. It is not the sickness of much thinking, for the longing for home dulls them. You have not told me all, and I do not ask it. I am an old woman, one who never before saw white men, and who am I to understand them? White men harness the thunder, cut and harden the iron, make signs with black water that are the same as words. Why, then, should they not have thoughts that we can not know?

"But you are my son, even my flesh and blood, and your happiness is my happiness. I would rather see you laughing with your own people than sorrowing with mine. When the Spring comes you will go."

"Go!" cried Dick excitedly. "But I can not lift a paddle."

"You will be well and strong when the snow has melted."

"But the chiefs! Your people! The calumet was sung and danced at my adoption!"

"And the calumet shall take you safely to your own people."

"How do you mean?"

"Leave that to me, my son. I am old. My life is spent. I will never again see the harvest of the wild oats, never again suffer through another Winter. My husband is gone, my two strong sons. You have been as a son to me, but why should you remain here after I am gone?"

"But they will follow, bring me back, and the calumet has been smoked."

"You smoked it to save your life. And what is the calumet to a white man? He has other vows, and you gave none of them. Content yourself, my son. When the ice is gone from the lakes your canoe will be turned toward the south. In the moon of the crane you will go, and, because you shall bear the calumet, in the moon of the rut of the elk you will come to your own people."

CHAPTER XVI

VIRGINIA

NOT again through the long Winter did the old woman refer to Dick's return to Virginia. Impatient, eager, he spoke to her one evening.

"Does my son doubt my word?" she asked sternly.

As he lay beside the fire, trying to determine whether she had spoken boastfully, idly, or whether she was really able to effect his escape from the Nadouaissioux, he discovered that the first of her predictions was coming true. Day by day he began to regain the use of his arm and leg. By Midwinter he could walk without assistance and could carry his musket. His strength returned and before Spring he was hunting moose and beaver with the men of the band.

In the Winter the Nadouaissioux scattered through the Great Lake country. In various places only a few leagues apart small villages of a few families were established. This gave to each an undisturbed game district and in Summer made it impossible for enemies to surprise the band. Before the foe had exterminated one settlement the word would be carried to the many others.

Dick and his foster-mother had Wintered on a small lake twenty leagues from the southernmost village. They were off the main stream of the Misisepe, separated from it by many small lakes and portages, and there were half a dozen villages on the route.

When the moon of the carp was in the last quarter and the snow had begun to go the old Nadouaissioux woman suddenly announced that she was about to make a journey and that she wished Dick to go with her. She had a small sledge upon which she bound food, robes and a mysterious bundle which she had been guarding carefully all through the Winter. Dick, though he could get no hint as to the object of her expedition, but hoping that it might mean the fulfilment of her promise, was eager to accompany her. Because she was old he asked to be allowed to pull the sledge, but she sternly informed him that his duty was to go ahead and hunt, leaving woman's work to her.

Each night they stopped in one of the small, marsh-bound villages. Here for the first time since Dick had known her she showed an interest in petty village gossip. Her stories of their own intentions and experiences both amused and disturbed the Virginian, but so great was his confidence in her he did not ask questions. Back of it all he felt that there must be some motive, some purpose. So he sat silently beside the camp-fires while she asked innumerable trivial questions and inquired into every action through the Winter of every one she met.

At the end of the week they passed the last village. Still the old woman kept on and they camped that night in the open. But her garrulity had ceased as suddenly as it began. Now she sat for long hours beside the fire of dead pine, staring unblinkingly into the flames. She kept her thoughts to herself, offered no explanation to Dick of their mysterious journey. Each night he fell asleep while she sat thus, and each morning he wakened to find her there. Apparently she never slept.

For another week she led him on into the south, along the frozen bed of the Misisepe, which was now only a small, winding stream. Neither as they trudged on through the day nor as they sat beside the fire at night did she speak. As the time passed she seemed to grow more feeble, to become more weary after the day's toil. But always her eyes were bright and steady and each night she refused to stop until darkness made further progress on the rotting ice impossible.

The afternoon of the ninth day after leaving the last village she turned toward the shore and pushed the brush aside.

"It is here," she said simply. "We can rest until the river breaks its bonds."

Dick, from his position behind her, caught a glimpse of red birchbark behind the bushes.

"A canoe!" he exclaimed.

"Did you think I wasted my breath in all that foolish chatter in the villages?" she asked sharply. "Did you think I cared for gossip of all their silly doings?"

"And you asked thousands of question to ——"

"To learn one thing, that this canoe was here behind these bushes. Now, my son, we have only to wait until the ice is gone. It will be soon, for the moon of the crane is new and I said that in the moon of the crane you would start to find your own people."

Now that she had reached the canoe before the rotting ice drove her to the difficult travel along the bank, the old woman was more cheerful and communicative. The first night, after a supper of wild rice and moose meat, she brought out the mysterious bundle and untied it. It was long and thin and the outer wrapping of tanned moosehide disclosed a hunting shirt fringed and decorated with bands of porcupine quills. Without a word she handed it to Dick.

His astonished thanks were sincere for he knew that the quill work had required every spare moment of the Winter, but his eyes were fixed in what still remained in his foster-mother's hands. It was the reason for the odd shape of the bundle, a long, richly ornamented calumet. Dick recognized it at once as the most sacred possession of the Nadouaissioux, the same pipe with which the treaty with the Saulteurs had been affirmed.

His foster-mother was busy, however, with another and smaller bundle. As she unwrapped the skin Dick exclaimed in amazement. She held half a dozen small bells, the tongue of each bound with a thong so that it would be noiseless.

"Where did you get them?" he demanded as he looked at these unaccountable evidences of trade with Europeans.

"Listen, my son," she began. "This calumet will bear you safely through the lands of strange people. Only show it, wave it toward the sun, smoke it with the people you meet, and you may pass unharmed. Never was there a calumet so powerful. The people of any nation who see it will recognize it at once.

"The shirt you must wear always. Upon it I have sewed quills of colors and in forms and figures which denote my prayers for your safety. These are as the words the white man makes with the black water. This," and she pointed to a row of odd figures, "will preserve you from storms. This one will assure you fair weather. This will keep you safe from the jaws of wild beasts and the monsters you will meet far down the 'great water.' This will preserve you from the treachery of people like the Islinois and others who have no honor. I have spent the Winter working these prayers upon your shirt that I might know my son will be safe.

"The bells our people once received from the Hurons when they came to trade before we learned their black hearts and drove them far to the east. A few Summers ago the Outaouas attacked our people in the great marshes where we spent the Winter. They became lost and our warriors surrounded them. They hid like the ducks, with only their heads above water, crawling in the wild oats and reeds.

"For a long time our warriors waited, but they did not come out. We knew they had not escaped for there were no signs. At last the warriors found only one piece of dry land where the Outaouas could leave the marsh and across this, in the grass and brush, they stretched a fish net and to that they tied these bells, which they had received in trade from the Hurons. Then in the night the Outaouas crawled like snakes through the marsh and in the darkness thrust their heads against the net and caused the bells to ring. Our warriors came and slew a hundred of them, all except one, who was sent back to his people with the story of how we deal with those capable of such treachery.

"These bells are a sacred possession of our people but now they are yours. In your long journey you must go alone, must have time to sleep. Each night you are to tie strings to the brush near where you sleep and place these bells upon them. Then you will be warned in time."

DICK was overwhelmed by the thoroughness of his foster-mother's preparations but in her every act he saw only disaster for herself.

"I can not let you do this," he cried. "What will your people say when they learn that the calumet and the bells are gone? What will become of you when they learn you have taken them, and to aid me to escape?"

"Where are my son's wits?" she replied scornfully. "Do you think you could have passed through all those villages alone, could have reached the 'great water,' without setting every one to talking, and to thinking, without having a band of warriors at your heels? Do you think you could have passed on the ice without it being known? And, if you had waited for the ice to go, where would you have found a canoe, and how could you have carried one past the villages? My people believe you are one of them but a little thing would have given them strange thoughts, and you would never have reached the big falls.

"That was another reason for my talking. I told them my dead husband's spirit had come to me in the Winter and told that the beasts had destroyed his grave and left him uncovered. They think I am going to cover my dead anew and that you go to help me."

"But you! After taking these things, after all that you have done, what will your fate be when you return?"

"Your wits still hop about like the bugs in the grass," she answered. "I am not going back."

"But you—you—you don't intend to go with me?"

"I will go with you, my son, so far as the prairie where my sons died. There I, too, will die. I only hope that I will live long enough to reach the spot."

"But you are not ready to die. There are still years of happiness for you."

"There is never happiness for the old women of my people. When we are old and useless no one cares for us. Our children have duties of their own, the mouths of their own children to feed, their own families to protect from the enemy. There is no happiness in the lives of the old. Their thoughts are in the past. Their fingers are stiff and can not sew garments. Their legs are feeble and they can not hunt enough to eat. Their arms are stiff and they can not gather enough wood to keep them warm through the Winter. When one is too old to work one is too old to live. Yonder is the last new moon I shall ever see."

While they waited for the ice to go Dick tried to persuade her to return to her people with the calumet and the bells, only to find her purpose unshakable. Her husband and her sons dead, her adopted son on the way to his own people, life held nothing, she declared, and she only feared that she would not live long enough to reach the grave of her sons.

Dick could not understand her assurance that she could time her death so accurately. She had marched long hours each day, dragging the sledge. She seemed to be strong and well. And yet when the ice had rotted, the river had opened and at last they had embarked on the long journey, he saw that her paddle was ineffectual, that she made only the motions. Before they reached the great falls she was forced to admit that she could no longer gather the firewood and cook the meals. Only in her eyes, black, blazing, unquenchable, did life seem to remain.

Dick, now that he had started at last for Virginia, now that he was on his way with the message he bore, paddled steadily through the long days. The river, swelling hourly, bore him swiftly, but his paddle shot the little canoe even faster. The great falls were passed and the lake where the Saulteurs had ambushed the Nadouaissioux. Landmarks slipped by one after the other and he knew that two or three more days would see him at the mouth of the Ouisconsin.

But as he watched the silent figure curled in the bow he wondered if she would live to see her desire fulfilled. For days she had lain there in the bottom of the canoe, motionless, uncomplaining, her wasted body consumed bit by bit by the fire of her unconquerable will. As Dick's fear that she would die any hour became greater her desire became his and he pressed on early and late, driving his little craft with the one purpose of reaching the bartering-place in time.

It was mid-afternoon of a bright April day when at last he turned into a channel setting in toward the eastern bank and shot down to the prairie above the mouth of the Ouisconsin. It was deserted. The bare poles of *cabines* scattered over the plain seemed like ghosts of the thousands who had thronged the place when he had last seen it.

As he approached the bank he feared that he might be too late. For hours he had not seen a movement of the silent figure in the bow. He stepped ashore and leaned over her.

"We are here, my son," she said as her eyes opened. "You have your mother's thanks. Carry me up so that I can see the prairie and I will die in sight of the place where my sons lie."

He lifted her from the canoe and carried her to a knoll from which she could look out over the plain to the bare bluffs beyond.

For a few moments she sat there, only her eyes moving. Then they closed and for the second time, on the banks of the great, unknown streams of the great, unknown wilderness, Dick felt that he was alone.

As carefully as with the body of Antoine Goddin, he prepared a final resting-place for her after the white man's fashion. He dug deep in the soft earth and piled stones upon the grave. Then with his ramrod he burned an inscription in English upon a hewn board.

Sorrowfully and slowly he paddled away, caught the current and was swept down and across to the bluff at the base of which he had buried Antoine just a year before. For an hour he sat beside the tomb he had built, gazing out over the river, recalling the last moments with his friend.

"Good-by, Antoine," he said softly as he arose.

IN HIS abstraction Dick paddled until dark before he went ashore on an island to camp for the night. Day after day passed and he drifted down the mighty river, which constantly grew larger as streams flowed in from either side. The towering bluffs at last gave way to sweeping prairies. Game was abundant, the weather delightful. Peace and contentment seemed to hold the land, but always Dick paddled, always he pressed on, spurred anew by the thought of the two graves he had left at the mouth of the Ouisconsin.

Islands were numerous and afforded comparatively safe camping-places. One night, however, he tried the western shore and in the morning wakened to find a group of strange savages about him. Soberly he filled and lighted the calumet, waved it to the sun and the four quarters of the earth, and then passed it to the strangers to smoke.

The magic of the pipe was more potent than he had dreamed, annoyingly so, for they insisted upon taking him to their village and feasting him for three days before he was escorted back to the river. He found they were the Ottos, a branch of the Ouinibegous, distant cousins of the Nadouaissioux. There was no difficulty in understanding their dialect, and from them Dick learned that the wilderness, now taking the form of great plains, extended for several leagues to the westward, ending at the great mountains without a sign of salt water. On the plains were many and strange nations, and beyond the mountains, it was reported, were still other lands and other people.

The Ottos warned Dick that he would find savage people and still more savage monsters if he continued on the "great water," but he fired his musket to show what he could do and departed with their best wishes.

A large stream flowed in from the east which he took to be the Rocky River. Two noble streams joined the great water from the west, and still the boundless prairies continued. Sometimes the Misisepe swung to the southeast or southwest, but almost always he traveled south.

At last he came to the mouth of a river on the east which he believed to be that of the Islinois. Twice he had passed villages of these people but had avoided being seen except by a solitary hunter he encountered on the shore.

Immediately after passing the mouth of the Islinois Dick came to the influx of a stream on the western side. It was a turbulent, muddy giant of a river, rushing into the beautiful, calm Misisepe, discoloring its waters, causing great, swirling eddies, taking possession of the valley and dashing on, carrying the canoe more swiftly than it had ever traveled before. Dick recognized it immediately as the great stream of which Western savages had spoken as the bartering-place the year before, the Pekitanoui, or "muddy river," afterward to be known, through another savage language, as the Missouri.

In the mammoth river in which he now found himself Dick began to watch eagerly, at last anxiously, for the Ohio. From the vegetation and the climate he judged that he was as far south as Virginia, but still he was traveling straight on.

His belief that the Ohio joined the Misisepe was based on the rumor Basile Pombert had heard from savages he had seen and from his own knowledge of the country. He had traveled straight north from the Ohio nearly to Lac Mecheygan on a large stream. The Islinois flowed from nearly the same place and toward the southwest. In the great triangle between there would not be room for another river so large as the Ohio, and he reasoned that the first big tributary on the east must be the one he sought.

When he was about to despair, beginning to think of turning back, fearing his geographical guesses had been far wrong, he reached it and turned joyfully toward the east.

Long days of toil followed. The river was high, with a good current, and it turned and twisted in a manner that became increasingly exasperating. But after a few days remembered landmarks were passed and he went on with new energy, assured that his course was right. He spent almost every hour of the day in the canoe, but as his supply of wild rice gave out he was often forced ashore for game. Once he pressed on regardless of food but the consequent weakness convinced him of the folly of such a course.

Twice the calumet won passage past large villages of strange savages. Once when he was cooking a meal on shore two Indians crept close in a thicket and his life was saved by the prayers embroidered on his hunting-shirt.

But he knew that, once he had reached the mountains at the head of the Ohio, his calumet and quill-worked applications to the spirits would be unavailing. Only in the great valley of the Misisepe did the pipe hold sway. Then his skill as a woodsman and blind chance alone could win through to the settlements on the eastern side of the Blue Mountains.

And they won through. Near the head of the Monongahela he abandoned the canoe and struck into the wilderness. He avoided valleys in which he knew the savages would gather, kept on the high levels and slowly, cautiously wormed his way past.

In his concentration on the one purpose to reach Virginia Dick never forgot that he was only fighting his way to certain death. But not once since he had burned his inscription on the oak that towered above the "great water" had this consideration even made him falter. Scarcely, in fact, did he even think that his achievement might allay the hatred of Berkeley. If he had thought of himself at all it was only that his fate was insignificant in the face of his duty.

This feeling increased with the strain of constant watchfulness through the thousand leagues of travel since he had left the land of the Nadouaissioux and his greatest fear was not of Berkeley but of failure when the goal was almost in sight. As the strain increased there resulted a nervous condition that made sleep at night only a fitful jumble of dreams.

Twice he had cause to be thankful for the thoughtfulness of his foster-mother when the bells, tied to strings in bushes near his resting-place, warned him of the presence of prowling savages. Each time he risked the noise of firing his musket, for he knew that the entire tribe would be at his heels if he permitted the prowler to escape.

Fifty leagues from Jamestown Dick discovered the first evidence of an Indian uprising. An isolated clearing, far up toward the foothills, contained only the blackened timbers of a cabin and the bones of the settler's family. He had realized that in the colony of Virginia itself, where long association with the whites had bred an intense hatred, and where Governor Berkeley's fear for his fur trade had induced a policy of no defense, would come his greatest danger.

With this evidence of the savages' hostility he could not tell whether it was an isolated massacre or whether he would find a string of ruined plantations across the colony and the survivors besieged in Jamestown itself. He kept to the thick swamps, the most inaccessible places, traveled only at night, spent most of his days in watching. Once he found the trail of what he believed to be a small war-party, and again he saw a thick column of smoke that undoubtedly rose from a burning settler's home.

Dick was greatly weakened by the strain, sleeplessness and lack of food. Days and nights spent in the dark, dismal swampland, his body wet and shivering, finally had their result. When only a few leagues from his father's plantation the fever caught him.

Still he forced himself to go on, barely a league a day. He was almost too weak to walk. Often delirium brought visions of hatchet-swinging, yelling savages bending over him. One evening, after dragging himself forward all day he came out upon the bank of the James. Down the stream a little way he saw the bow of a canoe hidden in the grass. When darkness fell he crawled into it, pushed out into the current and drifted down.

Every inch of the land and water was now familiar, even at night. In another league he would reach the cleared fields of his father's plantation. A league beyond that he would see the manor house outlined against the sky, if it were there, if the savages had confined their operations to the outskirts of the settlement.

A BEND in the river suddenly disclosed the lighted buildings. They were safe. Jamestown was safe. He worked the canoe painfully and slowly across the current to a point where, he knew, he would strike the wharf. In a few minutes he was walking up the broad path.

The great hall door was open, the windows lighted, but no one was to be seen. He crossed the broad veranda, entered the hall. The door of the dining-room opened and an old negro woman stepped out.

"Marse Dick!" she shrieked, and turned to flee. He caught her by the shoulder and swung her back.

"Where is father?" he demanded.

"Is yo' daid?" she demanded in terror.

"No," he answered sharply. "Where is father?"

"He's done gone over to Marse Carver's fo' de big dinner to his lawdship an' de gobernor, Marse Dick. Where yo' been?"

"The governor! Governor Berkeley? Is he there?"

"Yes, Gobernor Berkeley, an' he's at Marse Carver's, too."

Dick swung around and walked out through the door. He was deathly weak but he had shaken the grip of the fever from his brain sufficiently to realize that he could hang on only a little longer. Before the veil again descended, before what he believed would be the end, he must find the governor.

He stumbled down the steps and turned to the old familiar path through the pines. His feet seemed naturally to find their way, making each turn, lifting themselves over each root and stone. A quarter of a league and he stood before Carver Manor, brilliantly lighted in every window. From the open door came a burst of laughter. Staggering, he crossed the lawn, mounted the steps, entered the door.

A liveried servant barred his way. Dick thrust him aside, muttering — "The governor."

The servant ran for assistance and Dick walked down the hall to the door which, he knew, opened into the dining-room. It was closed. He lifted the latch, half-fell as it swung open. He caught himself, stood stiffly erect and his eyes swept the brilliant scene before him.

The great table was bright with dozens of candles in their golden sticks, with plate, china and glassware. Around it were more than a score of people, the cavalier aristocracy of the colony, the women with gorgeous gowns direct from Paris, the men equally resplendent in silks and laces, vivid colors and shining swords.

A woman glanced up at the door and screamed. The chatter and the laughter ceased. Men sprang to their feet, hands instinctively falling to sword hilts.

Colonel Carver, at the head of the table took a step forward, only to stare in amazement at the figure in the doorway. Before him stood a tall man, thin, shaking with the fever, his skin deathly white beneath a scraggly beard, his buckskin garments caked with mud, a rusty musket trailing at his side, but with eyes that burned as brilliantly as a dozen candles and with a head held high and proudly.

"Dick!"

Instantly all eyes turned from the apparition in the doorway to the young woman who had cried the name. She had risen from the table and stood staring. Her beautiful face had become as pale as his, while in her eyes was both terror and disbelief.

"Dick!" she repeated unconsciously. "Dick Jeffreys!"

Instantly the brilliancy of the staring eyes was clouded. Dick's proudly held head was lowered and a great, overpowering amazement impelled a step forward.

"Betsykins!" he whispered. "It is really you, Betsykins?"

As their eyes met Dick forgot the fever, the Misisepe, Berkeley, the noose, the brilliant assemblage, everything except this incomprehensible transformation from boyish comrade to wondrous, alluring womanhood. In the half-delirium of fever his mind instantly comprehended each act of his past and its consequences in the future. Heedlessly, prodigally, to satisfy vagrant, trifling whims, he had dissipated man's greatest fortune. With startling clearness he recognized what that last interview beneath the sycamores had meant to her, how he had hurt her, what he had now brought upon himself.

"Betsykins," he repeated in a low voice, one hand groping helplessly toward her.

In that moment Dick Jeffreys knew what he desired more than anything else in the world, that for which no sacrifice was too great. It was not Betsykins, his playmate, but Elizabeth, his mate, who stood there before him. But as he looked at her he saw the gulf between them.

The thought maddened him. What were kings and empires and governors' hatreds, what were purpose and high resolve and duty, before the demands of this overwhelming love that he had always felt but had never recognized? And yet he had fought his way back to stare through the noose at this glory that might have been.

Forgetting everything else, completely crushed, the iron resistance that had kept Dick on his feet for the last few days began to desert him. His head fell forward. His eyes half-closed. One hand groped for the door-handle. The candles began to swing about his head.

"Jeffreys, eh?" snarled a voice from the table.

The hatred expressed in each syllable, the gloating inflection on the question at the end, stabbed through Dick's wavering consciousness, brought his head up with a snap. An old man seated at the left of Colonel Carver had risen to his feet and as his eyes met Dick's the young Virginian's vision cleared instantly.

"The same, your Excellency," he replied steadily and clearly. "I am Richard Jeffreys, and I have the honor to report that I have been far beyond the Blue Mountains, have reached the 'great water' of which we have heard. I did not find the Red Sea, the Gulf of California. It is a thousand leagues from here. But I have discovered a great river, greater than any river in Europe, and a land as large as two Europes, a land more fair, more fertile, than man has ever known. I was the first white man to see it, to traverse it, and I claimed it in the name of the people of England and their king, Charles the Second."

CHAPTER XVII

THE DISCOVERY

FOR a few moments after Dick had finished speaking there was not a word, not a movement, about the big dining-table. Since the founding of the colony seventy years before there had been continual speculation as to what lay beyond the Blue Mountains. From the Spaniards had come amazing tales. They had traveled far to the south and west, even to the Eastern ocean. They had found gold and pearls, rich nations, strange lands.

But of what lay to the north of the Spanish country, of what lay west of Virginia, behind the Blue Mountains, no one knew.

Now this fever-stricken, wasted figure had suddenly appeared before them and had announced that not only had he been farther than had any white man before him, but also that he had taken this land of mystery in the name of the king of England.

It was Sir William Berkeley's eager voice which first broke the silence.

"You found gold, precious stones, pearls, for the king?"

"I found something more valuable than gold," answered Dick, "a land which holds greater riches, and I found it for the people of the king."

"And you expect," asked the governor coldly, "that this will ransom your seditious carcass, that this will save you from the noose you slipped?"

"I expect nothing," and Dick's voice rang out proudly. "I found a land far more fair, far more fertile, far more vast, than I have ever seen before. And I took it in the name of the people and the king of England. And because you are the king's representative in Virginia, I have come to you to report."

"And do you think the king will balance that against your evil tongue?" demanded his excellency in a rage. "What does the king want of more wilderness? We can't keep the savages out of what we have here in Virginia. What is land worth when it is so far away? Had you brought gold, or news of gold, the king might have listened to you. There is gold there. The Spaniards have found it.

"You have not been beyond the Blue Mountains, sirrah. You have hidden with the thieving, murdering savages in the foothills and have come out with this wild tale because you sickened of the life. Summon a guard, Colonel Carver. This man goes to the Jamestown gaol."

There was a gasp of amazement from the diners. Dick's manner of speaking, his burning eyes, his simple words and his startling announcement had convinced them all, had won for him the allegiance of every one except Sir William.

"You hold the right to say the gaol, sir," answered Dick. "I expected nothing else from you. But I found this land, I traversed it for hundreds of leagues. It is a year last April since I first saw the Misisepe. Since then I have tried unceasingly to return. I would have been here a year ago had I not been twice captured by strange savages.

"You may call this land worthless, but the French think otherwise. They have penetrated far, but none so far as I have gone. Their king was about to send a priest and a representative to find the 'great water' and take it in his name. But I was first. A tree is blazed with the announcement of my discovery. Scorn it if you will, but the day will come when it will be filled with the people of our race, when there will be great plantations, towns and cities, when there will be a thriving commerce on its waterways. Scorn it and let the French have it. The responsibility will be yours."

"To the gaol!" ordered Sir William in a fury. "I will listen to no more of this! I will not hear advice from an outlaw! Take him away!"

There was a scream from Elizabeth Carver and she dropped into her chair and buried her face in arms outflung among the china and glassware. Since she had first seen Dick in the doorway, had called his name, she had stood there looking at him, hoping, praying that he had retrieved himself.

As she sat there sobbing, an old man farther down the table, his hair white, his face deeply lined, staggered to his feet.

"Dick! Dick! My boy! My boy!" he cried as he flung out an arm toward the figure in the doorway.

"You forget yourself, Captain Jeffreys!" snapped the governor. "Yonder stands a fugitive, an outlaw, a defamer of his Majesty. He is no son of yours."

"He is my son!" answered the father hotly. "And I am proud to say it, for he stands there now, proving himself a man."

"To the gaol with him!" shouted Sir William in a rage.

"I beg your Excellency's pardon," a cool, low voice broke in, and immediately there was silence, while every eye was turned toward the speaker.

He was a giant of a man, his great head with its high forehead, wide-set eyes and long black curls fittingly surmounting the imposing bulk of him. Of all the men at the table, he alone had not risen, had not shared in the excitement caused by Dick's entrance and announcement.

Big as he was, there was nothing formidable in his appearance. Rather, in his strong, gentle face, in an expression of mental power that made one forget his physical size, there was something that instantly compelled confidence, and as he spoke even Governor Berkeley turned deferentially.

"There is nothing here in which you can even interest yourself, my lord," said Sir William with a bow. "This young outlaw, after defying the king and his laws, ran away from the noose that he deserved and now returns with this impossible story with the expectation that it will save him from the gallows. The only importance of this incident to you and to his Majesty will be the knowledge that we deal rigidly with sedition in our colony."

"I am sure, your Excellency," the big man replied calmly, "that his Majesty is sufficiently assured of your zeal. It would be more fitting the governor of so great a colony if he employed his head a little more than his heart."

A GASP, followed by a low murmur, broke from men and women alike, and Sir William blushing furiously, again bowed low but remained silent.

The big man turned in his chair so that he faced Dick and for a moment he looked at him curiously.

"A chair for Mister Jeffreys," he ordered without taking his eyes from the ragged figure of the young Virginian.

"No, not there!" he said sharply as a servant placed a chair behind Dick. "Here, beside me! So. Now a glass of Colonel Carver's good Madeira. Quick, simpleton! Can't you see the man is ready to faint?"

Dick staggered across to the table and dropped into the chair.

"Your lordship," began Governor Berkeley. "I pray you! Do not let yourself be contaminated by this fellow."

Dick glanced up angrily at Sir William.

"Perhaps," he said, "his Excellency

would like to have me tell of our last interview."

It was a chance shot, for Dick did not believe that, except for the two gaol warders at the door, any one in the colony would ever have a suspicion as to the manner of his escape from Government House.

"Your lordship," the governor choked, "there is only one place for this traitor, the gaol, and tomorrow morning I promise you he will swing from the gallows."

"I don't doubt it in the least, Berkeley," replied the big man calmly. "But it is not serving the king well to use his power to settle a personal grudge, and I have no doubt but that you would snuff out the chance for empire to save your dignity."

Dick glanced at his lordship, marveling at the shrewdness of the man in so quickly divining the true situation between himself and the governor. Sir William, pale with anger but silent, retreated to his chair.

"I might add," continued the big man, "that Mister Jeffreys has given tonight a sample of the stuff of which empires are made, a glimpse of the courage and perseverance which is the boast of England, and which gives his Majesty pride in the worth of the people he had been granted the right to rule."

He turned to Dick, looked at him a moment, and then, the rich lace of his cuff falling upon the muddy, torn buckskin leggings, laid a hand on the young man's knee.

"My boy," he said, "I am Lord Crompton. I am just arrived from his Majesty's court, am his Majesty's personal representative sent to report upon conditions in his colony of Virginia. Anything you may say to me will be faithfully reported to his Majesty, and I assure you that his Majesty is deeply interested in your story. First, tell me where you have been, what you have seen, and what you have done."

Dick, revived as much by the kindliness and understanding of his lordship as by the glass of wine, recited briefly his experiences since he had left Virginia thirty months before. As he talked the very thought of the wonderful country he had found inspired him, and, when he had finished, the diners, men and women, had gathered around him and were listening intently.

"Your Excellency," said Lord Crompton when Dick had finished, "had you been acquainted with the 'Relations' of the Jesuits as published in Paris, you would recognize nothing except truth in what Mister Jeffreys has said. Had you read them you would marvel at the fortitude of our young friend here, would stand in awe of what he has accomplished. To me it is an honor to know him, and I hope that he will give me his friendship."

He paused for a moment and looked at Dick.

"My young friend," he said at last, "I wish I could be spared the words I must speak now."

The circle drew closer. Elizabeth Carver, who had pressed near with the others, stifled a cry.

"I know," his lordship continued, "that, as a brave man, you will receive bravely what I have to say."

He paused for a moment and then continued impressively:

"You are too late. The vast land you have found has been lost to England, not through your own failure, but through the failure of the king's representatives in the colonies. Had there been others like you we would have been the fathers of empire."

"Lost!" cried Dick. "Too late! You mean the Jesuit? Marquette?"

"Marquette, and Louis Joliet, emissary of the king of France. I was in Paris the first of the Summer. The city was aflame with the news of what they had found. The land has already been claimed by the French.

"The date?" demanded Dick. "What was the date?"

"They reached the Misisepe, of which you have told, though Marquette called it the Colbert, about the middle of June, last year. They went down the river a great distance, returned up another to what they called Lac Mecheygan, and thence to Montreal, where Joliet arrived in November. The news was immediately dispatched to Paris."

"Then we win!" shouted the young discoverer. "We still win! The tree opposite the mouth of the Ouisconsin stands there now, blazed with the date, April 17, 1673. That was two months before the French arrived."

"Even so," said Lord Crompton, "the French still win. I can not tell you or any one here my reasons, but England is not in a position, at present, to dispute the claims of France."

"But it is not right!" protested Dick. "It is not the land for the French. They are fur-getters, not empire-builders. Everywhere they take from the land. Nowhere do they put anything in it. You can see for yourself. Look at the St. Lawrence, where they have settlements. There it is the fur, only the fur. Nothing is built for the future. This land that I have discovered is for our people, people who will care for it as we have cared for Virginia, who will, year by year, put in more than they take out, who will build up for those who will come after, not tear down."

"You have a vision, my friend," said Lord Crompton, "but too far-sighted, too impatient. Some day, inevitably. Now, no."

"Then what I have done, what I have hoped for, is for nothing?"

"By no means. Brave deeds are never for naught, nor such work as yours."

But Dick did not hear. The disappointment, combined with the excitement and the tension of the moment, snapped the slender thread by which he clung to consciousness. His body sagged in the chair, his head fell forward, and he slipped to the floor. Kind hands straightened out his legs and arms, but his head rested among the Parisian silks and laces of Elizabeth Carver's gown.

"Dick! Dick!" she cried. "Doctor!" and she looked wildly around until she saw the physician pushing through the crowd. "Tell me he won't die!"

"Of course not, my child," was the answer. "It is only the swamp fever, the fever piled upon the other load that burdened him. But he is strong. First, we must get him to bed. Colonel Carver?"

"I am honored to have Captain Jeffrey's son in my house," responded the colonel quickly.

Strong arms bore him up the stairs, women crowded the door to be of service, and only Governor Berkeley remained below with Lord Crompton.

"Your Excellency," said his lordship, "may I not congratulate you upon the estimable young men of your colony. I am sure his Majesty will be delighted with my relation of tonight's affair."

Sir William bowed low.

"I am always at his Majesty's service," he murmured. "It is never my desire to thwart his slightest wish."

"I am sure of that Berkeley, and I am sure that the king will have no cause to disapprove of your actions in the future."

DICK opened his eyes the next morning to find himself in a bed for the first time in two and a half years. At first he believed he was alone. Then he turned his head slightly and saw his father sitting beside him.

"Better, Dick?" asked the old man gently.

"I am strong enough to stand on Sir William's gallows," was the reply. "That's about all I came back for, it seems."

Instantly he realized that at the first opportunity he had only driven his dagger deeper into a torn heart.

"Forgive me, father!" he cried impulsively as he reached for the hand that lay on the coverlet. "It seems that I am destined to wound you to the very end. But I can't help it. After seeing that land to the west, after striving for a year and a half to return with the news of my discovery, there can't be much else than bitterness in finding the fate of our people rests in hands like those of Berkeley."

"There is nothing to forgive, my boy," answered the old cavalier gently. "In one stroke you have wiped out whatever sorrow your heedless youth may have brought to me. And there need be no fear of Berkeley. We are beginning to see what he is, what his rule is doing for the colony. We are all loyal subjects of his Majesty, but we are citizens of the colony of Virginia, and right must rule here as it does in England."

"But the old devil's claws are still unclipped!" protested Dick.

"They are pulled out by the roots so far as you are concerned," and Captain Jeffrey's face glowed with a pride of parenthood that so long had been denied him. "Lord Crompton rebuked the governor in the presence of all the guests last night, unmistakably gave Sir William to understand that he is to be held responsible to the king for your safety."

"He is the big man who talked to me."

"The same, and a man with a heart and a mind bigger than his great body. The king turned over the colony to two of his favorites, sold us out, and there has been such a stir that his lordship was dispatched to settle the matter. He is a favorite with the king, but he is a man, and——"

"He is a man!" interrupted Dick eagerly. "And if such as he can put up with the folly of kings in the hope that something good will come out of it for all of us, I can do no better than follow."

"You will follow him, my boy," and again the father's pride lighted up his face. "He sails for England in two weeks and he told me last night that you are to go with him, are to tell his Majesty in person what you have found. And then, Dick, you are to come back, perhaps not to Virginia, but to the colonies in this new world, for there is much to be done beyond the Blue Mountains, and you are to lead the work."

"For a king!"

Dick's old resentment flashed for a moment.

"My boy, as we grow older we learn many things," answered his father soberly. "I begin to think of a king, not as a divinely empowered ruler of the people, but as—well—as——"

"As a symbol of the Government only," Dick supplied.

"Exactly. I'd hang for this if it were known, but it is so, my boy, and perhaps you will live to see the time when kings themselves are forced to admit it. But you are weak, and there must not be more strain. Sleep a while, Dick. In a few days I will take you home."

When Dick wakened again it was to find a cool hand stroking his forehead.

"Elizabeth!" he cried in amazement as he turned.

For a moment he drank in her beauty, absorbing each detail of the whole that had so staggered him the night before. The brown, freckled skin of the romping child had become clear, ivory-tinted with rose petals. The straight, boyish figure had rounded, swelling into the fulness of the womanhood that had, to Dick, so miraculously come to her. She blushed at the scrutiny but her eyes could not hide her happiness.

"Elizabeth," he whispered as he reached for her hand. "Betsykins! What has happened to you? Oh, what a fool I have been! My mad brain sent me off in search of adventure and what I sought all the time was here. Only now it is too late."

"Too late! Lord Crompton humbled Sir William before you last night."

"Father has told me all that. But I was not even thinking of Berkeley. It is you, Betsykins. You are no longer the girl I last saw under the sycamores by the river."

"That was not yesterday, Dick."

"Two years and a half!"

He turned his head away.

"Two years and a half to achieve failure," he whispered bitterly.

"Not failure, Dick," answered the girl quickly. "Did not your father tell you all the plans?"

"Betsykins! You know what I mean, what is more dear to me now than all else in the world. Blind fool that I was. My own boyish thoughtlessness lost it all for me. But tell me at least that you forgive and forget that last night beneath the sycamores. Believe me that I did not know what it was that I sought then."

"Dick! Don't! You must be quiet."

"But answer me, Betsykins."

"There is nothing to forgive or forget. It is all in the past, wiped out by the fact that you have come back to me, back to Virginia, you, the man I always knew you would be and the man I love."

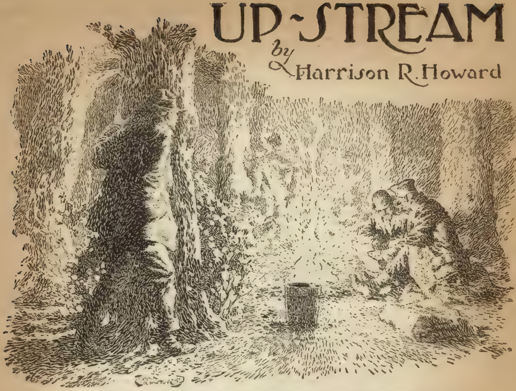
She said it proudly, arrogantly, head held high. But only for a moment, for Dick's arms drew her face down to his.

"What have I done to deserve all this?" he asked humbly. "Antoine, my Nadouaissioux mother, and now you."

THE END

UP-STREAM

by Harrison R. Howard



Author of "In the Sawdust Country," and "Afraid of the Bar."

HIGH on the rude wall of the office, the battered clock boomed off the remaining seconds. At his desk in the inner office, Potter sat peering out through the window to the great gray sawmill which stood, a buzzing hive of activity, at the edge of the purple river. Miss Carleton, in the outer office, drummed a rapid tattoo with the end of a pencil on the glass top of her desk. Behind her Fenwick, the bookkeeper, was nervously thumbing the pages of his ledger.

Miss Carleton glanced up at the clock. There were four minutes left. Her eyes turned to the inner office through which she could see the man who, when the four minutes were gone, must rise to meet adventure in no mean proportions. Four minutes, she reflected; yet he sat gazing casually out through the narrow window.

As Miss Carleton studied the motionless, statue-like features of the man in the inner office, an expression of deep admiration, of fondness glimmered in her expressive eyes. Behind her the clock continued to toll off the seconds. The tattoo of her pencil ceased abruptly. She rose and crossed to where Fenwick stood before his tall desk.

"I think my nerves are about to snap," she whispered guardedly, so that the sound would not carry to the inner office. She nodded backward, in the direction of the open door. "I wish I could be as cool as he!"

Fenwick, middle-aged, lean, and pallid, turned amused eyes upon her.

"Cool?" he returned in a nasal whisper. "And why shouldn't he be, I'd like to know?"

Miss Carleton's brows contracted.

"With Harrigan and his gang to face tonight?"

Fenwick giggled with huge delight.

"Him face Harrigan? Why, he hasn't got the nerve!"

Miss Carleton's eyes flashed in quick loyalty.

"That's not true!" she responded stoutly. "When the report came in this morning that Harrigan had raided our log rafts, Mr. Potter said that tonight would end Harrigan's career on Suicide River. Mr. Potter is waiting for the shutting-down whistle now."

Fenwick nodded readily.

"Yes; he said that, but he had a long talk with Sheriff Dunn afterward. He's not going up-stream after Harrigan. He's sending the sheriff and his posse to do it for him!"

Miss Carleton drew back with a quick intake of breath.

"Why—why the sheriff and Harrigan work hand in glove. The sheriff is on Harrigan's pay-roll."

The bookkeeper drew the green eye-shade from his forehead with an emphatic snap.

"Potter's sending him because he hasn't got the nerve himself. He's afraid to settle his own scores. If he was half a man he'd take a posse of the mill boys, and round up Harrigan tonight. But instead he sends Dunn!"

Miss Carleton's sensitive lips quivered. She cast an uncertain glance over her shoulder toward the open door of the inner office.

"You—you must be mistaken," she said indignantly. "Mr. Potter is—is a man! He'd not go to Sheriff——"

She stopped. The whistle of the great gray sawmill beyond the office shrilled its six-o'clock bellow. The screech of the saws died gradually to a low whine, then ceased altogether. The planers relinquished their chattering discourse. The cough of the driving engine stopped. Silence crept over the little sawdust community.

Miss Carleton turned about and swept another glance at the open door. "I'm—I'm sure you are mistaken, Mr. Fenwick, I know that Mr. Potter wouldn't——"

A peremptory summons from the electric buzzer above her desk interrupted. A moment later she stepped through the open door and stood across the wide desk facing Potter.

"I'm afraid, Miss Carleton," he said, gathering up the papers on the desk, "that I'll have to ask you to stay later tonight. I'll have a report or two to dictate a bit later. And another thing, Miss Carleton, when Sheriff Dunn arrives have him come in immediately. Tonight he and his posse are going up to the South Fork after Harrigan."

MISS CARLETON'S fingers tightened spasmodically on the edge of the wide desk. From outside the office, came the loud tramping of many feet as the mill crew passed on their way to the mess-house. An instant later Fenwick slammed the outer door.

"You're—you're not going up after Harrigan yourself?"

Potter glanced quickly up from the papers on the desk.

"The sheriff will attend to that. That's what the county pays him for, Miss Carleton."

Her tanned cheeks flushed deeply. On the surface of the desk her finger-tips beat an erratic tattoo.

"The sheriff is going to do it for you!"

Potter rose to his feet and stood facing her across the desk. His gaze rested interrogatively on her evident agitation.

"Surely the sheriff. That's his job, Miss Carleton."

An expression of wistfulness and of disappointment came upon her face.

"Then its true, you're afraid!"

Potter smiled tolerantly.

"My dear Miss Carleton, you've excited yourself over something."

"I'm—I'm afraid you don't understand," she murmured, hesitated for a brief moment, then swept honestly on: "You've only been in these woods a short while. But I was born and raised here, and the traditions are—are part of me. Here in the sawdust country a man fights his own battles. He doesn't ask outside help. And you're sending the sheriff to fight yours. We—we call that cowardice!"

Potter's lean, youngish face bore honest concern.

"But Miss Carleton I'm a busy man, and have many things——"

Her lips quivered.

"You're—you're afraid!"

"You do not understand," he began, but did not complete the thought. Miss Carleton drew herself erect in sudden dignity. She halted the drumming of her fingers. The abrupt cessation of their emphatic tattoo was in itself an emphasis.

"Then all they say is true! You are afraid and you make this an excuse. The sheriff! Why—why he is as dishonest as the man you are sending him after. He's in the employ of that very——"

The street door opened and closed. Miss Carleton turned about. In the outer office, awkwardly twirling his hat in his hands, stood Sheriff Dunn.

She whirled quickly back to face Potter. Tears of indignation glistened on her rounding cheeks.

"You're afraid—a coward!" she sobbed

hysterically; and, brushing aside the tears, she drew herself erect, and sped through the open door to her desk in the outer office.

At Potter's nod the sheriff entered and took his position across the desk. Potter's face, a bit flushed, was as expressionless as a piece of sculpture.

"Well, Dunn, are you ready? How many men did you get?"

The sheriff shifted the weight of his body to one foot, and cleared his throat apologetically.

"I'm afraid I can't do anything for you, Mr. Potter. It would be a wild-goose chase."

Potter's brows lowered.

"Can't do anything? What do you mean, Dunn?"

"Well, I've had the matter investigated and come to the conclusion that your logs wasn't stole last night. The boom-sticks must have parted and the logs drifted over the bar to sea before daylight."

"Investigated? Who investigated?"

"Jackson did this morning."

"Jackson? Why, that man is——"

"He is my deputy-sheriff, Mr. Potter."

"A deputy? Why, Dunn, every one knows his connection with Harrigan."

Dunn's face flushed.

"You're wrong, Mr. Potter. I advise you to drop the matter. I don't want to have no trouble with you."

"You don't? By——, so that's the way the things stand. You don't! So, all these whisperings about you and Harrigan are correct. You're another of Harrigan's jackanapeses."

The sheriff leaned across the desk.

"I warn you, Mr. Potter, them words——"

Potter rose to his feet. When he spoke again his voice was low-pitched, and firm with restraint.

"Get out of here quick, Dunn. I'll get my own posse to get Harrigan."

Dunn wavered a moment; then stepped to the door.

"As I said before, Mr. Potter, I advise you to drop it. You can't get no posse in this town tonight. My deputy, Mr. Jackson, just took the whole crew down to Danville in his launch. He's giving 'em a dance down there. You may find one or two boys still in town—but I advise you to forget it."

The outer door slammed sharply behind the sheriff. The boom of the battered clock sounded again through the room.

Potter turned his gaze to the window. Darkness was fast settling down over the gray mill. He swung about and jerked open a drawer in the desk. Taking up an automatic, he dropped it into his pocket, squirmed into a heavy red mackinaw, and took up his hat.

"That will be all for tonight, Miss Carleton. In the morning we will make the report—if there is one to make."

Through the broad front windows she watched him go. Closing the door behind him, he made off in the direction of the mill wharf. He passed the bunk-house without so much as a glance, and continued toward the river's edge. Miss Carleton sprang to her feet. He was going without a posse.

"He's going alone! No! No! They'll kill him! It's—it's my fault! I taunted him! I said he was——"

She sprang toward the door; but halfway, her knees ceased to support her body, and a moment later the void unconsciousness descended upon her.

WHEN darkness had settled over the surface of the river, Potter spun the fly-wheel of the launch motor, and a moment later, at low speed, piloted the light craft from among the piling of the mill wharf, out upon the breast of the moonlit river.

A heavy tide was running, which, together with the natural current of the river, forced him to increase the speed of the motor in order to make way against it. For a time he held steadily toward the open water; then, as the middle of the river was reached, he threw over the tiller, and the launch's nose swung about and headed up-stream.

It was fully five minutes before the craft gathered full speed against the force of the rushing waters. The dim shore-line on either side of him swept by like a moving picture. Overhead, the stars twinkled faintly, dimmed by the light haze which hung over the river. A vague wraith of a moon stuck its thin, spindle points into the gray sky.

He did not underestimate the difficulties of the task before him. He was acquainted with Harrigan and with Harrigan's methods. This river pirate was one of the most daring characters in all the sawdust land. Ruthless, treacherous, resourceful, he was surrounded by a crew of his own choosing. Potter's eyes glittered with anticipation, and he advanced the throttle of the motor.

As he rounded a big bend in the river, a brisk breeze drove down upon him from the deep mouth of the river valley beyond. Settling himself at the tiller, he rolled and lighted a cigaret, and busied himself noting the landmarks as they swept by.

As the launch breasted the mouth of the South Fork, Potter threw over the tiller again and ran the craft into the narrow tributary. Here it was far darker than on the main arm of water, the trees on either bank mingling their foliage to shut out the dim moon and stars.

At a quarter of a mile from the mouth of the fork, Potter reduced the launch's speed, and directed the craft in among the heavy undergrowth of the right bank. Then he sprang ashore, making fast to the heavy bough of a fallen forest giant.

He scrambled quickly up the bank, and reaching the flat above, paused a moment to take his bearings. Then, without hesitation, he pushed ahead in the general direction of Harrigan's camp.

The slight mist of the early evening was disappearing, and the sky and stars seemed to have grown inestimably closer to earth. He was grateful for this meager light; the way underfoot was heavily overgrown and cluttered with dead brush and the limbs and trunks of fallen trees.

He halted suddenly, clutching the automatic in his pocket until the edges of steel stung the flesh of his hand. A dark shadow moved ahead of him, and without hesitation, he dropped flat on the ground. Crouching low, he watched the dim figure walking back and forth across the moonlit trail.

Flat as possible on the ground, Potter crawled at right angles to his original direction, guarded by this shadowy figure, which, he knew, must be one of Harrigan's pickets. It was slow, tedious work; the twigs and branches which covered the ground were dry and brittle, making great the chances of discovery.

After perhaps ten minutes he reached a wooded spot, and rose gratefully to his feet. He had not been detected. The sentry still warmed himself by treading back and forth across the mouth of the trail.

Smiling to himself, Potter turned about and started by the roundabout passage in the direction of Harrigan's rendezvous. This way, although longer and more difficult to traverse, presented far less chances of discovery.

He made his way slowly and cautiously. Once or twice the darkness confused him, and he was forced to strike a match in order to take up the dim trail. The flare of the match he carefully concealed within his cupped hands, exposing the light in but one direction at a time.

At perhaps half a mile from the spot at which he had taken the wooded trail, Potter discovered at some distance a dim glow. In these deserted woods it could have but one meaning. He knew that it was from Harrigan's fire; and when he went ahead again, it was with decreased speed and increased caution.

At every yard the glow increased, and when the flames became visible between the tree trunks, Potter chose his footings with wearying exactness. He reached the edge of the clearing without sound, and concealed himself behind a huge fir.

A small fire blazed in the center of the cleared space. At a short distance stood a large pail of drinking water, and many rolls of blankets. About the fire, sprawled in various poses of relaxation were half a dozen woodsmen, some dozing, some conversing guardedly in whispers.

Closer to the fire, carefully apart from the others, sat two men in close consultation. One of them held up a sheet of paper to the firelight. Unlike the others, they did not whisper, and their conversation reached Potter's straining ears.

The smaller of these, Potter recognized as Harrigan. He was a wizened little man of perhaps forty years, sinewy of build, catlike of movement, and bronzed to the color of old copper by the river suns. He was reading to the other the figures from the sheet of paper. The listener, a larger man, was quite unknown to Potter.

The stranger took the paper from Harrigan's hand and holding it up to the light of the fire, scanned the figures it bore.

"That scale was made of the logs today," Harrigan was saying. "Look her over and make us an offer. You needn't be afraid of trouble with Potter. He's got no nerve. We'll attend to the brands on the logs, and also to gettin' them down to your customer's booms. So let your figure be big enough to cover such incidentals."

The stranger busied himself with a study of the sheet.

"A fine flock of logs," Harrigan pursued conversationally, and apparently without intention of helping out the sale. Indeed, he seemed utterly indifferent as to whether or not the other purchased his plunder. "You'll find them mostly clears, Benson. Potter was bringing them down to his mill to fill a big order for uppers."

Potter's sense of the dramatic told him that his moment to make an effective entrance had come. Despite his iron control, his breath caught once with an eager gasp. His hand on the automatic inside the mackinaw pocket, he stepped briskly into the circle of firelight.

"Yes," he said evenly, grinning to the startled Harrigan, "and Potter's going to take 'em down to fill that order!"

Panic took the place of the camp's drowsy calm. Every one sprang to his feet. So startling had been Potter's appearance that, as he approached, the men involuntarily retreated to the opposite side of the fire. Across the low flame they glared at him from frowning, startled eyes.

Doubtless the more imaginative of these hardened woodsmen had thought, at the moment of his appearance, that a forest ghost was come to pay them a visit. Potter gave little heed to them, however, concentrating his attention upon the quick, tiger-like movements of Harrigan, whose small, bead-like eyes were fixed on the bulge of Potter's pocket, where the muzzle of the automatic was pressed.

"In all fairness I must warn you, Harrigan," Potter remarked at the first sign of activity on the little man's part, "that I'm not alone. There is a man with a gun behind ever tree about this clearing. This community has stood for your raids as long as possible. I'm in dead earnest, Harrigan, and you'll be obliging yourself more than me by just taking things easy."

Harrigan, a sudden surprise dawning in his eyes, turned a quick, nervous glance about the dark rim of firs which surrounded them. For a moment he seemed to cower before their dark, sinister silence; but presently his eyes became defiant again, and he turned back to Potter.

"What is it you want, Potter?" he asked easily.

Potter laughed with genuine amusement.

"Isn't that question rather unnecessary?" he returned.

Harrigan stared blankly across the smoldering fire.

"Possibly," Potter continued, "you can get away with that on the sheriff; but I think we understand each other, Harrigan."

The little man shrugged his shoulders. The others, sullen and silent, grouped themselves about their leader.

"What is it you want, Potter?" Harrigan repeated mechanically.

Potter glanced amusedly about from one to another.

"With so many rare birds, the selection *is* rather difficult. But I guess you'll do, Harrigan. I want you."

The little man grinned.

"Just me?"

"You and that sheet of paper," Potter returned good-humoredly. "The combination is beautiful. It cinches you nicely. Even your man, the sheriff, can not ask for more evidence."

Harrigan's eyebrows raised.

"The sheriff? My man? I'm not acquainted with the gentleman, Potter."

"Nevertheless, I imagine he is well acquainted with your money."

Harrigan grinned and dropped into his pocket the sheet of paper which bore the scale of the stolen logs.

"So!" he murmured after a moment's pause. "So! You want me, eh?" He glanced keenly into Potter's face.

"Exactly," Potter nodded.

For a moment Harrigan's eyes dropped to the ground at Potter's feet. Suddenly he glanced up, his eyes cold as steel, his full-lipped mouth mocking.

"Well, what are you going to do about it, Potter?"

"I'd really not advise you to start anything, Harrigan," he said smiling. "However, that is your own lookout. I've given orders to my men to pick you off first—at the first movement."

Harrigan nodded indifferently. Potter paused a moment, baffled by the man's self-assurance. He wondered if Harrigan were as certain as he seemed that he held the high hand in the situation.

"You've raided my booms three times, Harrigan," he went on finally. "On each occasion you half-killed the man who was employed as watchman. The man you got last night is right now fighting for his life at the camp hospital. And his chances are slim. He is a pal of the boys

I've brought with me. They'll not hesitate to pick you off."

HARRIGAN grinned. His right hand slid along his belt toward the butt of a revolver which obtruded from a large canvas holster. Of the group across the fire, he was the only one visibly armed. The others kept their hands at their sides. But their eyes were full of the activities of their chief.

Harrigan's hand continued along the belt and came to a stop on the butt of the revolver.

"They tell me you used to be a cowboy," Potter laughed. "Think you can draw fast enough for those boys out there?"

Harrigan grinned back good-naturedly. In another moment his beady eyes narrowed menacingly.

"Now Potter, you've had your little say, and finished. It's my turn. Here's mine, Potter!"

Without removing the revolver from its holster, he fired twice, downward into the ground.

"Now, Mr. Potter, you'd better go ahead and take what you want. But you'll have to be quick. In less than a minute there will be enough of my men around this camp to pick the bones of you and your gang. It's your say, Potter. Now come!"

A vast doubt rose in Potter then as to the success of his carefully planned ruse. He removed the automatic from his pocket, and directed it frankly across the fire.

"Don't move," he snapped, and retreating a single step, stood beside the large pail of drinking water, considering this new phase of his adventure. Although not one of them moved, a general grin spread over the faces of the group he held at bay.

Harrigan was grinning mockingly across at him. A moment passed; then another.

A loud tramping of underbrush sounded, steadily growing nearer. A moment later six men, panting breathlessly, burst into the clearing.

"What's the signal for, Boss?" the foremost of them asked as he caught his breath.

Potter laughed outright, and with the muzzle of the automatic motioned them across the fire.

"Over there with the rest!" he ordered. He turned quickly and called back over his shoulder to his fantom reenforcements—

"Watch 'em close, boys!"

A vague, concealed smile sparkled in his eyes at this new turn of affairs. He swung back to face Harrigan.

"You come with me quietly, Harrigan. I've had enough of your bluffing, now I mean business. You're the only one I want just now. My boys will stand guard over this fine crew of yours until I've got you safely away. If one of 'em moves so much as a hair my men out there won't spare him."

Harrigan, his face purple with rage, turned viciously on the men who had come in answer to his signal.

"You fools—you fools! Why didn't you stay outside the clearing? They've got us surrounded and—and you walk right in too!"

An expression of vast astonishment, which quickly changed to sheepishness, spread over the faces of the newcomers.

Potter laughed heartily. He motioned to Harrigan with the automatic.

"Well, Harrigan, come along. No time to——"

He hesitated abruptly. A moment later he swung his gaze to the dark rim of firs which circled the clearing. A sudden alertness was evidenced by the carriage of his head.

The new sound drew every eye. Two minutes passed. A seventh man stepped into the light of the clearing.

Harrigan, his eyes bulging, strangled his rage with effort.

"My God! You too!"

The other grinned appreciatively.

"Wait a minute, Boss. Don't heat your collar. I just overheard what you said to these guys and I had a look-around. There ain't a soul in these woods but what's right here!"

Harrigan's wizened face was a study of transformation from one violent emotion to its direct opposite. A vast delight kindled in his eyes. He turned upon Potter with a roar.

"A stall! Well, I'll be crucified! Potter, you're good!"

The hard lines of the little man's face eased to a great laugh. As his laughter ended, his eyes became beady and small again, and his mouth twitched at the corners.

"Well, Potter!" he snapped, defiantly advancing a step. "Why don't you take what you want?"

He advanced still another step.

"I call your little bluff, Potter. Now come!"

Potter came.

Stooping, he caught up the pail of drinking water which stood close by, and dashed its contents over the neglected fire. With a hiss and a puff of steam, the flames were blotted out. The sudden extinguishing of the glare which had been in their eyes momentarily blinded the group. In this moment of darkness, deepened by the overhanging foliage which shut out almost completely the dim light of the stars, Potter sprang forward.

His spring carried him straight to Harrigan, who was now several paces in advance of his men. With the butt of his automatic, he rapped the little man gently but with deft accuracy, on the head; and as the other slumped into a limp heap, and before the rest had regained their wits, picked up the light burden and carried it swiftly toward the wall of dark firs which surrounded them.

Gaining the seclusion of the forest, he secured a fresh hold on the limp form of Harrigan and swung him across his shoulder like a slain deer. Then he started swiftly down the wooded trail toward the river. Behind him he heard the thud of bodies as the others scrambled about in the darkness searching for him.

Hoarse cries arose; orders were bawled by some lieutenant of the man on his shoulder. A rush of footsteps came along the trail. Other and dimmer sounds came from the opposite direction, where, Potter surmised, half of the crew were following the other trail.

Stepping behind a large fir trunk, he slid his burden to the ground, and propped it against the tree. He secured the hands and feet with leather thongs from his pocket, and placed a gag, fashioned from his handkerchief, over the mouth.

All about him now arose the calls and curses of the men beating about in search of him. With studied caution Potter stole from tree to tree, the limp form of Harrigan drooping over his shoulder. And when the chase had passed far beyond him, he returned to the trail, and thereafter his passage to the fork of the river was surer and swifter.

Half-way, Harrigan regained full consciousness. Potter set him down and tightened the thongs and the mouth gag. On his shoulder again, the little man squirmed viciously; but Potter merely put a turning pressure on the thong-bound wrists, and the struggling was given over to sullen submission.

Down the perilously steep bank he carried his captive and dumped him unceremoniously into the bottom of the launch. Then he whirled the fly-wheel, cast off the light painter from the bough, and sped down the narrow arm of water toward the open river. As the nose of the launch swung on to the river's breast, the first dim rays of the impending dawn appeared in the east, far above the tips of the towering firs.

Sitting in the stern sheets, Potter rolled a cigaret, and when it was alight, settled himself comfortably by the tiller, and guided the craft in the direction of the mill wharf in the town below.

As he sped down-stream, his mind crept back over the events of the night; and when he remembered that a certain girl—just the sort of girl he had dreamed about back in those college days of his, in far-away San Francisco—had called him afraid, he laughed softly, confidently, contentedly.

IN the little back room of the mill office, Potter sat guard over his prisoner. Harrigan, the thongs at his wrists and ankles loosened and the gag removed, lay sleeping fitfully in the bunk. In his shirt sleeves, puffing at his pipe, Potter sat close by.

He was roused suddenly from his revery by the sound of light, rapid footsteps approaching along the board-walk which ran in front of the office building. When the footsteps halted, a key was fitted into the lock of the office-door, and some one entered.

A faint, nervous tapping sounded on the door of the back room. Potter rose and tightened the thongs of his prisoner. A light hand tried the knob of the door, and finding it locked, the owner of the hand retreated across the office floor.

Potter slipped quickly into his mackinaw, unlocked the door, and stepped into the presence of Miss Carleton. She stood poised uncertainly in the center of the room.

Her eyes grew wide with relief as she saw him. She ran quickly to him.

"Oh, I'm glad—*glad* you didn't go!"

She was swaying wearily there before him and he put his arm about her slim shoulder to steady her.

"I haven't been able to sleep all night," she murmured weakly. "I've just paced back and forth the floor of my room, until—until I know every inch of the carpet!"

A light sobbing interrupted. She glanced up at him then from between damp, unsteady lashes.

"I was afraid you were hurt by what I said last night. I was very much afraid you had gone up-stream after Harrigan, and they'd killed you, Mr. Jim. Oh, I'm glad you didn't go!"

Potter smiled reassuringly.

"Perhaps, Miss Carleton, what you said is true."

She shook her head vehemently.

"No, no! They would have killed you surely! It would have been so utterly foolhardy. You're not a coward, Mr. Jim!"

Potter's arm tightened on her shoulder.

"I am very much a coward, Helene," he said softly. "There are many things I'd like to say to you now, but I'm not brave enough. And there is another thing I'm quite afraid of. I wonder if you would summon the sheriff for me?"

Miss Carleton's eyes were startled.

"The sheriff?"

"I believe the sum total of the sheriff's objections to going after Harrigan last night was lack of evidence. I've got some for him."

Miss Carleton's breath caught.

"You mean that you went up-stream—up-stream alone?"

He nodded toward the back room. Helene Carleton turned frightened eyes toward the open door.

"You will get the sheriff for me, Helene? I'm afraid to go for him myself."

She drew herself back from him with indignation.

"Afraid!" she echoed.

"You see, I've got Harrigan, himself, in there," Potter chuckled. "And I'm very much afraid, Helene, to leave him alone."

THE BABU AND THE BLACK BUCK

BY LOUIS ESSON

IT WAS at a wayside station in Northern India.

The station-master, an officious and voluble Bengali, was in a state of great excitement. Lady Bertram had arrived. She was the aristocratic wife of the great Lord Reginald Bertram, a high magistrate noted for his love of sport.

She presented a telegram. The babu salaamed.

"I have it safe, my lady. It was left at this station in my charge to be delivered on inquiry. The cartage is thirty-eight rupees."

"Impossible!" replied the lady. "I won't pay thirty-eight rupees."

"It is a corpse," replied the babu gravely, "and corpses are very expensive indeed, I assure you."

"Where is it?" she asked at last.

Impressed by his own importance the Bengali opened an inner door.

"The corpse!" he said proudly.

Lady Bertram sniffed and retired.

"I refuse to take delivery," she cried, and then walked away haughtily to her carriage, with her nose in the air.

I called the station-master.

"What have you got there?"

"It's Lord Bertram's corpse," he said.

"Great Scott! And Lady Bertram has refused to accept delivery of it!"

What was this tragedy, this Oriental mystery? I went into the office, but soon came out again. A huge black buck was lying there, a wonderful beast, but in rather high condition. So this was Lord Bertram's corpse! It seems the noble lord had gone hunting, shot the animal in the forest, and sent it along as a present to Lady Bertram; but the train was slow, the weather was hot, and the native official had confused various regulations.

"Well," I asked him, "what are you going to do about it?"

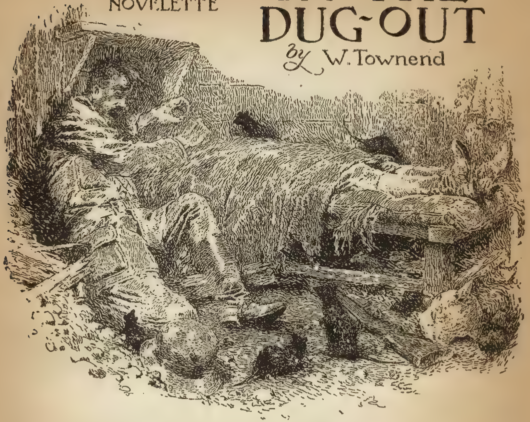
The babu again looked up the regulations. The case was perfectly clear.

"It shall be kept," he replied, "for three months, and then forwarded to Delhi to be sold by public auction."

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

IN THE DUG-OUT

by W. Townend



Author of "A Leader of Men," "The Other Side," etc.

KENYON was a brave man. On that point there were no two opinions in the battalion. And the more terrible and hideous his surroundings, the hotter the fight in which he found himself, the more resolute and clear-thinking he became. His men regarded him with a kind of awe, an awe not unmixed with a certain grim amusement, and since he showed no particular desire to preserve his own life, yet never asked that they should take risks that were not wanted, they followed him doggedly. They bore him no real love, however; he was too cold, too unapproachable; but he exacted respect by reason of his qualities in action, his courage, his dash, and his leadership.

To Kenyon himself failure in anything he had ever undertaken was inconceivable. Pride alone would have made him a success in war. For it was pride in his own destiny that carried him triumphantly through fights which others, more prudent, would have avoided. It was pride in his own powers, and nothing else, that kept him going long after another man would have given in. It was pride of race that forced him to become a soldier when all his instincts craved for peace.

His company sergeant-major, no mean judge of character, summed him up more or less accurately.

"A foine orficer, the foinest ever I seen in all France. But faith—the army don't come nach'ral to him at all, at all. He's no more likin' for the trinches or for going over the top than the rist of us. He's —— proud, all the same: so proud he'd be dyin' for shame's sake rather than give any wan cause to think that he hated the war. But I know it's thrue. I'm afther watchin' him many a time when he never knew I was by. You could see in his eyes what he was thinkin' of deep in his heart. I'm not blamin' him, aythur. 'Tis a —— of a war, this, an' well we know it."

As a civilian Kenyon had been entirely wrapped up in his work which was literature and his hobby which was old china. He was a dreamer with high ideals and expensive tastes. Vast wealth inherited from an uncle had freed him from all necessity of earning a living, hence he had been able to devote his time and talents to writing.

He had published two books on social evolution and economics, three slim calf-bound volumes of verse and a history of old English chinaware, all of which were highly praised by the press and neglected by the reading and book-buying public.

Although thirty-five years of age when war broke out Kenyon regarded it as his duty to join the army and so aid his fellow-country men in their task of defeating the Germans.

He announced his intention one morning after breakfast.

His wife, younger than her husband by some ten years, listened to his patriotic outburst in somewhat troubled silence.

"Well!" he said and waited the approval which he knew must, as usual, follow.

"There are many men younger than you," was all the comment she made.

"And am I to stand back," he flared, "until every man younger than myself, every shirker in the kingdom, makes up his mind? Am I not fit and strong? Any one would think I were an old man!" Wounded by the composure with which she had greeted his momentous decision he gave her once more the benefit of his views. "It is my duty to join. That should be quite sufficient. What is a man's duty to his country but to fight when needed? Do I owe less of that duty than my neighbor who has lived for six fewer years than myself? Am I to let others pay my debts? My God, Doris, I can't do it."

"But, Alan, how do you know you'll ever make a soldier?"

She spoke timidly, knowing full well the effect of any opposition to her husband's wishes.

"Not make a soldier!"

He gazed at her with an expression of offended dignity. Had she, his wife, after three years of association with him, so small an opinion of his intelligence? Did she doubt his courage?

"Why not?" he said. "Surely Doris I'm as brave as most men!"

The pain, genuine pain, in his voice cut her to the quick.

"Dear, I didn't mean that. I know you'll be brave of course. I was thinking of your—your temperament."

After that she did not speak for some time. Did he realize—he was dense in many ways, was Alan—did he realize what his departure would mean to her? She wondered. He would go away, out of her life; light-heartedly, she knew; perhaps never to return. Had he no duty to her? To his wife!

"You haven't considered my point of view, Alan, have you? You're a married man. There are others who are not married who have not yet joined."

A stubborn look had come into his thin, rather ascetic face. His lips were pressed tightly together while she was speaking.

"Doris," he said, "it's the same for both of us. You ought to be glad you have a husband to send to the army. It is your duty to let me go. Thank Heaven, I can leave you provided for. It can't be for long. We're bound to smash them."

"With a small army such as we've got!" said the wife.

"Wait till the men who are joining up now reinforce them," said the husband grandly. "I don't want to fight, God knows, but it's my duty! I think I can give a good account of myself. I know I can. Courage is merely a question of intelligent application of a rule. To lead men in battle demands duty, honor and, above all, pride."

He met her gaze, challenging a denial. She said nothing. Words were useless now, she knew. She understood only too well his meaning. Pride! What else was it but pride that was taking him from her? For pride's sake he would cut himself adrift. Pride would force him to do what others had done or die in the attempt. Pride set the standard by which he ruled his actions.

"What one man can do I can," he said. He patted her on the shoulder. "Be brave, old girl. You must. You're going to be a soldier's wife. And I won't disgrace you. You'll be proud of me, I know."

He was certain that what he said would come true. He would give her good cause for pride. The intoxication of war that comes to those who have never seen war, the spirit of the Crusader, was uppermost in his consciousness. That his wife had tears in her eyes was a vexation, but she was a woman and to a woman tears were natural. Nevertheless he hated scenes. Any display of emotion was undignified.

"There, there," he said. "You mustn't fret, sweetheart. It's part of the sacrifice——"

He stared blindly out of the open window at the meadows and woods and distant hills bathed in mellow sunshine and saw himself an officer at the head of his men fighting against odds, doing gallant deeds, winning fame and admiration.

A wonderful, brilliantly colored picture!

Doris would be proud of him. Even if he were to fall in battle, it would be fine.

And so Kenyon was prepared for death from the moment he set foot on the cobbles of Le Havre. Moreover, from his point of view it were more fitting to die bravely in the open than save his life by hiding in some trench or dug-out. Death, in other words, before dishonor. He lived up to the ideal he had in mind and gained much credit.

And then, during the Somme push, after more than fourteen months of fighting—

EVERY man, however brave, has some especial form of weakness. Kenyon's weakness, as revealed in a front-line trench one Summer evening, was peculiar but unimportant. Strangely enough, however, it did far more toward earning him the liking of his men than had all his courage. His weakness showed that he was, after all, human.

Kenyon was thorough in whatever he undertook. So having become a soldier through a sense of duty, and knowing the inevitable risks of his calling, he must needs prove his sincerity by displaying an almost reckless contempt for danger.

It was this quixotic folly that led him to make his way by himself through an enemy barrage to some men of another company cut off in a captured trench.

"You'll never do it," he was told. "It's madness to try."

Kenyon laughed and ran forward through the shells that burst on every side of him with great spurts of flame and dense columns of black smoke and earth and stones flung skyward.

Those whom he had left behind waited to see him fall but the impossible happens in war and Kenyon reached his men, organized an effective defense, beat off an attack and led the survivors back when it became dark.

The colonel thanked him.

"I don't know, Kenyon, when I've seen a braver or more dashing deed. I'll draw the brigadier's attention to what you've done and tell him what I think you deserve."

Kenyon was pleased, but he shook his head.

"That was nothing, sir: absolutely nothing at all. I can assure you that any one else would have done the same as I did. I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity, that's all."

This was no pose. Kenyon believed what he said, having as high a faith in his brother-officers as he had in himself.

It was on the evening after this exploit that he revealed to an interested gathering his own weakness.

He stood in a firebay talking to the battalion bombing officer, O'Hara by name, a mere boy in years but a veteran in experience and in a measure Kenyon's model.

O'Hara had by his own deeds set a standard of courage that was high: that he himself would reach that standard had been from the very first Kenyon's aim. And to O'Hara indeed, to his decision and coolness, he owed his life, for O'Hara had gone out into No Man's Land under machine gun fire and rescued him from the German wire where he lay helpless.

"Got over your excitement of yesterday?" asked O'Hara. "Pretty hot shop, that—eh?"

Kenyon smiled.

"Oh, yes! Pretty hot while it lasted."

"Best thing I ever saw," continued O'Hara. "I dunno' how on earth you got through, Kenyon. By Jove, I wouldn't have tried it, myself, for a fortune."

No man in his heart of hearts dislikes praise.

The color mounted into Kenyon's cheeks.

"You say that, of course, but you've done things every bit as good—better. I wouldn't be here now but for you, O'Hara, and you know it."

O'Hara laughed and looked at Kenyon with his head on one side as though considering him in a fresh light.

"Lord, that was nothing."

"Wasn't it?" said Kenyon. "I know it was. I'd given up all hope of ever getting away, anyhow."

"Rot!" said O'Hara. "It was pitch dark and I knew pretty well whereabouts you were. All I had to do was to find you, cut the wire where you were caught and help you in."

Kenyon nodded slowly.

"Yes, quite so, but there's more than one way of telling the story. Don't forget that you carried me in. I couldn't walk for about a week afterward. I might be hanging on that wire now."

"Rot!" said O'Hara once more. "You're such a queer old beggar, Kenyon. You'll talk by the hour of what other fellows do but when any one tries to point out that you've done about a hundred times as much as the rest of us put together you get quite upset by it."

There came a sudden shout from the other end of the firebay.

"Luk at that, will ye! Take that, ye brute!"

Kenyon turned sharply to see a rat-hunt in progress.

Rats, those few that had crossed his path in peace time, had always sickened him, but the trench-rats, scavengers bred by war, as foul as the jackals or vultures of warmer climes, filled him with loathing.

Their size, their savage daring, their cunning, their contempt for man, marked them as vermin to be avoided: yet how could one avoid creatures that swarmed in trench and dug-out, that, more familiar than the dogs of the house of Dives, stole the food from the very table, that crawled over one in the brief hours of sleep, that were met with—most horrible of all war's horrors—in No Man's Land among the poor dead that lay month after month awaiting burial.

To Kenyon the rats were a torment harder to endure than shell-fire or bullets; yet a rat-hunt with its almost inevitable killing made him nervous.

So now he shivered, forced a smile, and, ignoring O'Hara, moved away, hoping to be out of hearing before the brute met its death.

O'Grady, a lance-corporal in his company, aimed a blow with the butt of his rifle as the rat fled along the fire-step. The blow missed and the animal, twisting around raced back.

"Kill it, Sullivan!" shouted O'Grady.

"Out of the way, Terence! Mind yerself!"

Sullivan jabbed with his bayonet, shouting with laughter. Another hit out with an entrenching tool. The rat driven into a corner made a sudden spring at Kenyon.

"Oh, my God!"

A cold terror seized him. He could feel the beast clinging to his sleeve, trying to clamber up to his shoulder.

"Take it off!" His voice broke sharply.

"Take it off, for God's sake, some one!"

He shook his arm wildly, frantic with fear, and the rat was flung against the sandbags.

Sullivan, still laughing, brought his butt down hard on the creature's head, spattering brains and blood on the duckboard.

Kenyon fought down a desire to be sick. All his strength seemed to have left him: he knew that his face was white and that he was shivering all over, but the rat was dead and harmless, and he did not care.

"Lord!" he laughed and spoke in a tone of voice which even to himself sounded blustering and forced.

"I can't bear the sight of those things. I never could. I thought the brute had bitten me."

O'Hara's eyes twinkled.

"Kenyon, I'm agreeably surprised. In fact I'm delighted."

"How?" said Kenyon. "I don't understand."

"It restores my sense of self-respect to know that there's one thing at least that you fight shy of."

"But," Kenyon hesitated, wondering if O'Hara were laughing at him or not. "But, O'Hara, you don't expect, —— it! You don't expect me to make pets of the —— things!"

"No, of course not. I loathe rats myself. What makes me so glad is the thought that you're a human being with limitations the same as the rest of us."

Kenyon grunted.

"I'd rather go over the top any day than have one of those beasts touch me."

And O'Hara, knowing what Kenyon had done under fire, knew that he meant what he said. But O'Hara was not the only one to notice Kenyon's lapse into fear.

The men saw and chuckled.

"That bangs Banagher!" said O'Grady. "An' him afther marchin' as cool as ye plaze through a barrage o' five-nines without turnin' a hair of his head."

"We have found him out at lasht," said Sullivan. " 'Tis the rats that has him scairt! Faith, I know now he's flesh an' blood same as the rist of us."

"An' not a —— mechanical conthrivance for killin' Germans," said another. "By dam', I had to laugh at him."

But the shame of his encounter with the rat remained with Kenyon for days. His pride had been humbled. Even his own men, who should look up to him as one without fear or without reproach, must have seen his terror. Not even the news that he would in all probability gain a much coveted decoration, as a recognition of his daring when he went through the barrage, could comfort him.

He had faced the most terrible of dangers, unmoved: but a rat had shamed him in the eyes of all. His dignity had been lowered, his pride shaken.

AND then came the disaster that caused Kenyon's downfall.

The South Irish Fusiliers, advancing in long waves, had stormed the shattered, death-dealing mounds of brick and mortar which marked what once, but a few days before, had been a village nestling amid trees and gardens. There had been some fierce and bloody fighting with bomb and bayonet among the ruins before the enemy machine gunners had been hunted out of their lairs, and the South Irish had passed on, leaving their dead to be picked up by their stretcher-bearers.

On the further side of the village Kenyon and his company had occupied a battered trench in support of another company in front: the parapets had been leveled, traverses had been obliterated, great shells had split the firebays into wide craters, even the entrances to the deep dug-outs where the German garrison had sought shelter from the storm of steel had been rushed and broken.

Dead Germans caught by high explosives in the bombardment before the charge, or killed when the Fusiliers burst in on them with the bayonet, lay on every side in the strained attitudes of death.

Kenyon passed along the trench, driving his tired men to work, giving them no time for rest, intent only on strengthening the position they had won before ever the inevitable counter-thrust could reach them.

"Come on now, get to work you fellows. You've no time for idling. You, there, start filling those sandbags—make haste! Turn the parapet the other way."

"Is there no chance for a bite to ait, sorr?" Sullivan, his red face streaked with great smears of dust and sweat, his tunic unbuttoned and his shirt open to the sun, was speaking.

"There is not," said Kenyon. "Do you think that the Germans love you so much they'll let you sit here and take tea? You've no time to waste. Get on with your work." He looked about him. "Sergeant, turn those men to. Sharply, now, no idling!"

He passed on. The men, dog-tired and hungry as they were, growled and swore but did as they were ordered, shoveling the earth into sandbags and piling them on to what had been the parados, clearing the trench of the débris, preparing for what they knew must come.

"A harrd man, but a gran' sojer! Did ye see him leggin' it through thim ruins awhile back an' the Germans yellin' blue murrdher?"

"I wonder how many he kilt. I seen him down three with his revolver, meself."

"Will he iver learn wisdom?" said O'Grady.

"Or know the manin' of fear? He's a merricle of a man in a fight! Afraid of nothin' in this wurrld or the next!"

"Barrin' the rats," said Sullivan, "ye're shpakin' the thruth! An' may the divil blishter our artillery for battherin' this thrench the way they have us slavin' our guts out!"

"Shtow yer gab!" shouted the company sergeant-major. "Work now, the lot o' ye!"

A shell came shrieking toward the trench and burst within fifty yards with a deep roar. A column of black smoke shot up and a piece of heavy metal whanged viciously against the sandbags.

"There go the crumps. That's the first of 'em. They'll give us hell now, bhoys: you see if they don't!"

Shell followed shell in quick succession: through the crash of the explosions could be heard the incessant screeching of their downward rush: the air was heavy with the smell of high explosives, clouds of thick smoke enveloped everything, making it difficult to see.

The men were restless and Kenyon steadied them.

"It's not us they're shelling," he shouted.

"It's B Company in the trench in front of us. Keep on working there. You, Flanagan, do you hear me? Take up that shovel again. At once!"

As a hard fighter the Irish soldier is unsurpassable, that is acknowledged, but he has his moods. To be forced to work under heavy shell-fire, to fill sandbags and build up parapets anew, to dig out traverses and join shell-hole to shell-hole, when at any moment the enemy might launch a sudden attack, was not to the liking of Kenyon's men. Also, though no shells had as yet landed in the trench itself, though it seemed clear that Kenyon was right and that the Germans were shelling the trench in front and the village behind their backs, nevertheless for how long would they be immune? Kenyon could see by their faces that they were troubled and uneasy.

A shell burst with a crash close up to the parapet and a man dropped his shovel and ran for the slanting doorway of a dug-out.

Kenyon grabbed him by the collar and jerked him back.

"You stay where you are, my friend. I'll have no skulking in dug-outs before there's any real need of it. Build that parapet deeper: that's not going to keep a bullet out. And it's not your own —— rotten carcass I'm thinking of, either!"

As he moved on, he heard a laugh.

"Did ye hear that, now?" asked Sullivan chuckling.

"All the same, if ye're hit by a shell it's aiqual whether the Germans meant it fer you or the nixt fella. An' that's no lie."

Kenyon agreed. In that the speaker was most probably right. Nevertheless, shells or no shells, until they had finished rebuilding the trench, his men must work.

"LUK at that, will ye! There's some wan comin'."

Through the drifting smoke Kenyon saw a figure approaching the trench, moving slowly over the rough ground.

"'Tis Misther O'Hara!" said the company sergeant-major. "An' he walkin' like he was hurt!"

Kenyon waited, wondering if O'Hara brought tidings of disaster, or what. Then as he drew nearer he saw that he was limping, that his right hand, the sleeve hanging loose from the shoulder, was thrust inside his unbuttoned tunic, and that his left thigh was drenched with blood.

"All right, O'Hara, I'm coming."

Kenyon clambered out of the trench.

"What's the matter, old chap? Hurt much?"

"Hurt," said the boy. "A little." His lips twisted into a worried smile. "I had to come back, anyway. M'Keever made me." He swayed and steadied himself against Kenyon's hand. "Sorry! I'm all to pieces, Kenyon. Silly, isn't it!"

"Come back, sorr, for God's sake," said the sergeant-major. "Ye're axin' for throuble the way ye're sthandin' out there. Come back at wance!"

Kenyon led O'Hara into the trench, supporting him by one arm around his shoulders.

"I'm going to send you back on a stretcher, O'Hara. The quicker the M. O. sees you the better. Sergeant-Major, pass the word along for the stretcher-bearers at the double."

"I'm feeling —— queer," said O'Hara in a weak voice. "I can't—last out much longer, Kenyon. It's—it's my head."

"Here," said Kenyon, "you'd better lie down somewhere and rest."

"I doubt if you'll find any sthretcher-bearers, sorr," said the sergeant-major. "O'Reilly got killed awhile back an' Moriarty's afther takin' another fella off to hilp carry Corp'ral Ryan to the docthor. Ryan's bad with a bullet in his sthomach. But you can't lave Misther O'Hara here."

The shriek of an approaching shell growing louder and louder each instant cut short the sergeant-major's words.

"Get down!" shouted Kenyon. "Get down!"

The shell burst with a deafening ear-splitting roar at the far end of the firebay, covering the two officers and the sergeant-major with a shower of chalk and stones.

O'Hara lay as though dead, his sound arm shielding his face.

Kenyon bent over him.

"Are you all right, O'Hara?"

O'Hara began to whimper.

"Oh, my God, Kenyon, I'm done for! Don't let them get me!"

He sat up and clutched at Kenyon's arm. Stark and hideous terror showed in the boy's eyes; his lips quivered; he was shaking all over.

"It's those —— shells, Kenyon. I can't hold out any longer. They'll get me, I know they will. They can't help it if we stay here. Take me away, Kenyon, for God's sake! Take me out of it; you must!" The voice had risen to a scream.

Kenyon felt a sudden hot shame surge through him; that an officer in his battalion, one of his greatest friends, as brave a man ordinarily as ever lived, should have collapsed so hopelessly seemed almost unbelievable. That it was O'Hara of all men, made it worse. Never before had Kenyon known such fear in a human being. It was more painful than anything he had witnessed previously on the battle-field.

Why should shell-fire, however heavy, rob a man of his manhood? It was an officer's duty to show his men how to face death, yet here was O'Hara, a man to whom he owed his life, shivering with terror, cowering at the bottom of the trench, begging piteously to be moved to safety.

Kenyon was not hard-hearted, but it was neither right nor seemly that ordinary privates should see an officer so humiliated. Wounds or no wounds, O'Hara should have more control.

"We'd besht take him into the dug-out, sorr," said the sergeant-major. "He's in no fit shtate to be moved with thim shellin' the village."

Kenyon nodded, and helped O'Hara to his feet. A few yards from where they stood was an entrance to a dug-out, half choked by débris.

"Sergeant-Major," said Kenyon, "that dug-out's clear, isn't it?"

"It is, sorr. Shall I call a couple of min, sorr, to lind you a hand?"

"No, I'll take him down myself. O'Hara, can you hobble along on that leg of yours?"

"A little," said O'Hara feebly. "It hurts—like ——, but I'll try. Only—get me away out of this, for God's sake!"

He was weeping like a frightened child. His breath came in deep sobs. His skin had taken on a corpse-like pallor.

"Don't leave me, Kenyon, will you?"

Kenyon looked at him in pity: his anger and shame vanished. Poor old O'Hara! Was it possible that any one so good as he could have gone to pieces so completely?

"Come on, old chap, I'm going to put you into a dug-out, till I can get you taken away. Sergeant-Major, I'll be back in a minute. Make these men build up that parapet again. Keep 'em working!" And with one arm about the wounded boy's waist guided him toward the dug-out. "Rest all your weight on my back," he said, "and put your sound arm around my neck. Steady now, and I'll have you down in no time."

Very slowly and carefully so as to cause as little pain as possible, Kenyon half-supported, half-carried O'Hara down the steep stairs that led out of the blazing sunshine, down past a passage that crossed the stairs at right angles, down and down into the darkness of the dug-out.

"You'll be safe here," he said. "Hold up now, old chap, till I get you a light."

He struck a match and lit a candle which he had in his haversack. By its feeble glimmer he could see the four walls of the dug-out and a shelf piled up with rubbish; in one corner, a narrow bed made of a wooden frame and thin strips of iron on which were brown and filthy-looking blankets and a litter of fusty straw that smelled of rats; in the center of the dug-out, a broken table lying on its side; on the floor more straw, paper stained with blood, a German shrapnel helmet, fragments of food, empty bottles, equipment and rifles: hanging on hooks opposite the bed an old field-gray overcoat, a *pickelhaube* and some odd garments. At a glance Kenyon knew that the dug-out had been bombed, and he wondered if the occupants, if any, had managed to escape before the South Irish had reached the trench.

He fixed the candle in a pool of its own grease on a corner of the shelf: then, still with the same care, almost amazed by his own new-born tenderness, he helped O'Hara on to the bed.

"You'll be all right here, old chap," he said. "Nothing can touch you. You won't mind if I get back to the trench though, will you?"

"You mustn't leave me, Kenyon—you mustn't."

The wounded man's voice was little more than a whisper.

"I must, O'Hara. You wouldn't have me leave the men, would you?"

O'Hara moaned faintly.

"Don't leave me alone, Kenyon, I can't bear it."

Kenyon knew that he must be firm. He had been absent from his men too long already. Supposing that even now the trench in front had given away!

"I'm going, O'Hara. Can't help it. I must."

But as he spoke, frantic to be gone, yet not wishing to appear unkind, there came a sudden whistling screech and with the most appalling burst of sound, a crash as of the heavens splitting asunder, a shell exploded on the stairs. The dug-out, plunged into darkness, rocked with the concussion, Kenyon was hurled back against the timbered wall, the floor seemed to rise up under his feet and hit him, and he fell forward, his senses numbed, seeing nothing, hearing dully the echoes dying away and the noise of earth falling.

He rose to his feet, shaken and swearing softly, coughing as the dust settled on his lungs. Then he laughed aloud.

"That's lucky!" he said. "The blasted thing must have landed slap in the entrance. By Jove! I might have been half-way up the stairs."

He struck a match with a steady hand and lit the candle which had fallen.

O'Hara lay quite still with his sound arm once more protecting his face.

Kenyon, his nerves untouched by what had happened, but with the necessity for reaching his men uppermost in his mind, and fearing that O'Hara might again detain him, made for the entrance.

And then he stopped, sick with apprehension. His blood ran cold and his heart skipped a beat or two.

For the stairs up which he must climb to reach his company were blocked roof-high with masses of stone and chalk and earth and timber. Sick with horror, he clutched at a bulk of timber and tugged. It did not move, and he knew then that the shell had blown in the entrance to the dug-out and that all escape was barred. Unless help should come he was a prisoner, and perhaps even now his men were fighting!

KENYON looked at the solid planks that formed the dug-out's walls and what hope was left died within him.

Then once more he turned to the entrance, and filled with sudden, frantic rage began to claw at the débris that blocked his path, tearing out stones and earth with his hands, exerting his utmost strength to move the timber that, wedged fast between the roof and stairs, presented an impenetrable barrier.

He had forbidden his men to enter the dug-outs, yet here was he, their officer, who should have been with them in their trench, sharing the dangers that beset them, trapped in a dug-out. And no matter what efforts he put forth, no matter how hard he worked, single-handed he could not escape. Of that he was certain. To be rescued, he must be rescued from above—or not at all.

He stepped back and surveyed the pile of stones and earth that he had scattered at the doorway. The muscles of his arms and back ached with the toil, the sweat trickled down his face and neck. He had done his best, and to what purpose? As well might he try to demolish the whole dug-out as to clear a passage to the open air. He was a prisoner until a party should rescue him. And supposing the Germans were to recapture the trench!

He laughed shortly. Then he remembered O'Hara and crossed the small dug-out to where the wounded man lay on the bed in the corner.

"O'Hara," he said.

O'Hara's face was like gray wax in the light of the candle, his eyes were closed, his lips parted.

"O'Hara, old man, how are you feeling?"

But O'Hara neither moved nor spoke.

Kenyon, with a sinking heart, touched him gently. And then he understood.

O'Hara, whom he had tried to help, was dead.

For a time Kenyon did not move. Accustomed though he was to death in all its forms, nevertheless O'Hara's death stirred him to the depths of his being. It was not as though he had died a soldier's death, in the open and under the sky; O'Hara, brave and witty and happy, had died—Kenyon's mind sought a parallel—like a rat in a trap, in the darkness, and afraid. O'Hara, afraid! It was incredible. No one in the battalion had shown such reckless gallantry as had O'Hara and then to die as he had died, a prisoner in a German dug-out, and afraid! The thought shook him.

Kenyon whistled softly under his breath. And what chance of escape had he, himself? The one passage to the air was blocked. Would there even be air for him to breathe? He sniffed the close, rat-scented atmosphere. O'Hara had died like a rat in a trap! Was he not also trapped? He shivered and a sense of depression, of horror of he knew not what, stole over him.

From where he stood, his back to the

heap of débris, he could see the whole dug-out, dimly lit by the candle: the walls of perpendicular boards, the hanging garments—he wondered whether their lawful owner were still alive, whether he were a prisoner or still fighting—the shelves, the broken table, the chair, the papers stained with blood, the straw, the rifles, and the bed in the corner with O'Hara lying dead.

Kenyon swore softly. It came to him as a vague possibility that he too might die in the dug-out. Supposing his men were all killed! Who would know then what had become of him?

And as he brooded on what might happen, each moment feeling the sense of depression and dread growing within him, he heard from a dark corner of the dug-out where paper and books and straw had been scattered a faint scratching.

At first he paid no heed. Then the scratching was repeated. Suddenly alert in every sense, he waited, scarcely daring to draw a breath lest he miss what might be happening. Something was moving in the corner of the dug-out where the shadows were darkest. He could see nothing but he could hear some animal pattering across the straw and papers.

And then two tiny beads of red fire appeared in the darkness. Kenyon backed against the wall of the dug-out, and very slowly a huge pale-gray rat, mangy and leprous, the biggest he had ever seen, a monster with gleaming teeth and long whiskers, came into the circle of yellow candle-light and sat watching him.

Kenyon gazed at the animal in horror. And loathing such as he had never known before gripped him. His one impulse was to kill.

Stooping down swiftly, he seized a lump of white chalk and threw it with all his strength. His throw went wide of the mark, the chalk crunched against the wall, and the rat turned leisurely and slunk into the shadow.

KENYON wiped the perspiration from off his forehead. He felt sick with nausea. Even though no mortal eyes had seen him, he was ashamed. Excuses to justify his terror crowded into his mind. A man, placed as he was, a prisoner in a dug-out from which there was no escape, might well be forgiven for losing his control. He was not frightened, of that he was positive. Would one who could face shell-fire unperturbed, as he could, as a matter of duty, be afraid because a rat, however big or however ugly—Kenyon shuddered—was in the same dug-out? Impossible! Nevertheless, when once again he heard the same stealthy rustling in the corner, the same slow and cautious approach, he trembled.

This time the rat, if possible more repulsive and loathsome than before, ambled across the dug-out, not in Kenyon's direction, but toward the low bed where O'Hara was lying. It sat up on its haunches, like a dog begging, its front paws bent, its gray nose sniffing, its beady eyes red in the candle-light, its naked tail twitching, until Kenyon, breaking loose from the spell that bound him, made a sudden wild rush at it.

How it happened, he could not tell, but the rat avoided him clumsily and crawled under the bed. And to Kenyon the most horrible part of it all was that the animal all through never hurried, never showed the slightest fear, never recognized the fact that he, the man, was his master.

"Come out, you devil!"

Fighting down the disgust that rose up within him Kenyon picked up one of the German rifles that lay in the corner and thrust wildly at where he thought the rat would be.

"—— you, you beast! If I get you, I'll—I'll choke your life out!"

Blind rage against his tormentor had taken possession of him. Even if he were doomed never to escape, the rat would die. For O'Hara's sake he, who had won the D. S. O. on the battle-field, must conquer his fear.

A slight noise made him turn quickly. The rat was in the corner in which it had first appeared, watching him almost as though—Kenyon would have sworn it—as though amused.

With a snarl of fury, losing his last remnants of self-control, he hurled the heavy rifle across the dug-out. The rat squeaked, whether in fear or from pain he could not tell, and Kenyon was alone with O'Hara.

But he knew, he knew as surely as though he had been told, that his respite was not for long. The rat would return, of course. There was something vindictive and determined in the way in which it slunk in and out of the black shadows, something cunning and diabolical that chilled Kenyon's blood. Even for a trench-rat its boldness was uncanny.

Kenyon waited, his heart beating like a steamer's piston, his pulses throbbing, straining his ears that he might not lose the slightest sound and hearing close at hand a scuffling and a thin squeaking, and far away, above his head, the dull booming that he knew so well. His men were fighting maybe for their very lives, while he who would lead them gladly against the German trenches was sick with terror because a rat, a harmless, mangey rat, had been imprisoned with him. He could have cried for very shame's sake. And had he not in his pride despised O'Hara but a short hour since because his nerve had failed him? Who was he to talk now of manhood or courage, after this?

All at once, with a gasp of horror, as one plunged without warning into ice-cold water, he became aware of a lean gray form slinking along the floor.

Kenyon drew his revolver. He would make no move until he could see more clearly, then a bullet would finish matters once and for all.

But, although he had intended not to take his gaze from off his enemy—to fire and miss would be too awful—some instinct forced him to turn his head quickly. He caught his breath and could have shrieked aloud in sheer panic. On the floor beside the broken table were two more rats, gray and hideous like the first, but smaller. They watched him with fierce eyes.

Kenyon's hand and arm were shaking as he raised the revolver and fired. As in a dream, he saw one of the rats flatten itself out, reddening the floor with its blood, while the other scuttled to the shelter of the straw.

With the echo of his shot reverberating through the dug-out, Kenyon cocked his revolver and wheeled about.

Then, his senses in a whirl, mad with fury and fear and nausea, he fired three times in quick succession. The big, dropsical rat, the abomination that was driving him mad, sat like a vulture on the edge of the bed by the side of O'Hara's body.

AS HE fired Kenyon knew that he was shouting incoherently: what he said, whether the string of words made sense, he neither knew nor cared.

Splinters flew back as the bullets plowed into the thick planking, but the rat crawled over O'Hara's body and disappeared on the far side of the bed, untouched and, even now, unhurried in its movements. Kenyon stooped down and fired under the bed.

Then, dazed and sick, stunned by a new misfortune, Kenyon straightened up. He had one cartridge left and no more. His pouch was empty.

For a moment there came to him the wild thought of putting his last bullet through his brain and so ending his agony.

But would it be ended? Could he, a British soldier—and God, what a miserable specimen of a British soldier—desert O'Hara now, when he needed him most? Had O'Hara deserted *him* when he lay helpless, caught in the German barbed wire? Would it be fair to leave O'Hara, dead, and unable to defend himself? Was O'Hara any the less worthy now that he no longer lived? No, a thousand times! He would fight on as he had always fought, coward though he owned himself, unworthy though the enemy might be, until he could fight no longer.

Kenyon had lost all count of time, in carrying O'Hara he had broken his watch, but what seemed an eternity of waiting passed before the rat reappeared.

It was not alone. The snuffling and squeaking behind the timbers had warned Kenyon of what he might expect. Yet could a rat, even a trench-rat, war's most loathsome product, summon help? He laughed wildly.

They came on him suddenly. Almost before he realized it he was fighting, laying about him once more with the rifle, sweeping a wide circle from where he stood. Then he stopped, exhausted and despairing. What was the good?

Some he had killed—one, two, three, four—the others—seven of them—sat just out of reach of his rifle, that clumsy German weapon, and watched him. The big gray rat, the leader—Kenyon knew it must be the leader—was still alive. Its whole attitude was one of mockery and scorn. It seemed to be sneering at him, daring him to do his worst. It could not speak and yet to Kenyon's tortured mind it said:

"You can not kill me. Try again, my gallant officer, and you will find that I am right. I am too strong, too powerful, too clever. Who are you, proud soldier, to strive against me? My time is coming. I can afford to wait. Can you?"

"You fiend!" said Kenyon. "You fiend from hell!"

He raised the rifle slowly and brought it down swiftly with a crash, but the old rat had moved and sat a foot further away, blinking in cold scorn.

"Did I not tell you?" It seemed to say. "Was I not right, my fine gentleman? You can not harm me! Hero you might once have been, but now you are afraid!"

"Oh, God!" said Kenyon. "Oh, God pity me!"

Then to his unutterable shame, for it proved how very low he had sunk, how small a man he really was, he found that he was weeping, sobbing with fear and misery, as though his aching heart would break, even as O'Hara had sobbed after the shell had broken his nerve.

Was this the end then? Must he die like this, deep underground, surrounded by rats, a prisoner, robbed of every manly virtue he had possessed? Once he had been proud, and justly proud, of what he was; now rats had proved to him his folly.

Suddenly, without warning, and it only wanted this disaster to complete his misery, the candle, his one comfort, flickered and went out, leaving him in darkness blacker than the blackest night. And with the darkness came terror such as he had never known, a terror that was agony, a terror that stole from him his last remaining shred of self-respect and filled him with a blind desire to shriek for mercy, to force his way out of his prison at all costs, to pray, to scream, or else to die quickly, before terror killed him.

Shaking all over, his very strength sapped by fear, he fumbled through his pockets lest perchance a piece of candle still remained. He found only letters, letters from his wife, letters he might have answered, a pocketbook, a bank-note-case full of French notes and some silver francs.

The scuffling and rustling and squeaking was growing louder and more insistent. With the coming of the darkness the rats were bolder. Their smell sickened him.

He struck a match, and holding it aloft shrank from the sight that met his eyes—eight, nine, ten—twelve—fifteen rats. The light burned his fingers and went out, leaving with him, as a last impression, the big rat, the gray, scabrous beast, sitting on its haunches not a yard away.

* * *

WITH that desperation that is fear pushed beyond all endurance, Kenyon fired his revolver: then dashing forward blindly he kicked something soft and flabby and stumbling over the table fell with a crash on hands and knees. Sharp teeth met in the fleshy part of his thumb. He screamed aloud in insane panic and hit out madly with his revolver. And as he dealt blows right and left in the darkness, still on his knees, sobbing like some hysterical woman, he called to mind the memory of other days—such happy days they seemed—when he, an officer in the Royal South Irish Fusiliers—long lines of khaki with the bayonets dazzling in the sunshine—had fought by the light of day with human brings. Now, alone and far from all help, a clumsy mountebank, a laughing stock, he fought with rats! And in this last most terrible battle there would be no quarter.

Doomed to die—like a rat! Words of fire danced before his eyes.

Like a rat! He hit out with savage energy, cursing like any foul-mouthed private—he, the poet, the scholar, the hero—and crawled slowly around the floor, driving his enemy before him, feeling with the fascination of horror the soft fur bodies of the slain.

Anon, exhausted, panting for breath, he staggered to his feet and groped his way to where O'Hara was lying.

He must not desert O'Hara, of course. O'Hara had saved him from the Germans: he would save O'Hara from the rats. He would stay with him to the end. What end? He wondered. Was he going mad? God in heaven! He had no choice? He made a virtue of what must be. Stay with O'Hara! How could he leave him? What way of escape was there? He was doomed—doomed to die like a rat, fighting rats.

And after that there followed a lifetime of horror. The blackness choked him, enveloped him like a pall. His tongue, a strip of dried leather, clave to the roof of his mouth, the pit of his stomach seemed sunk and empty, cold waves of fear swept over him, the blood thundered in his ears, his eyes, open to their widest, ached with the strain of trying to pierce the blackness.

And as he crouched beside the dead boy, his hands moved to and fro, up and down, ceaselessly, feeling in each direction, touching from time to time O'Hara's thin features or his hands or his body to reassure himself that all was well. When, as often happened, his fingers came in contact with a rat, loathing and terror would overwhelm him and he would strike with his bare fists or make a sudden grab and sometimes, to his horror, find himself gripping a struggling, squirming, biting handful of fur and nails and teeth. And never for one instant did the rustling and scuffling and squeaking and pattering of feet cease.

Never was he free from the knowledge that behind his back the big, gray rats were watching him, biding their time, exulting in his degradation. He, who had been proud, was in their power.

And then when flesh and blood could no longer stand the strain, when he felt that madness in grim earnest was coming, he lit one of his last three matches. It spluttered and flared up.

At the foot of the bed sat the big, pale-gray rat, hideous and bloated, its eyes blinking with the knowledge of all evil, its pointed nose sniffing and turned this way and that, its purpose unconcealed.

The match went out and Kenyon, shouting wild curses, made a grab at the monster.

When, a little later he put the muzzle of the revolver to his head and pulled the trigger, the click of the hammer mocked his effort. The bullet he had meant to save had been wasted. It was not his fate to die by his own hand; he must fight while life lasted. Did he not belong to the South Irish, a regiment that had never yet given in to an enemy? Was he to give in now?

And once more, his breath was coming in deep sobs, he began the slow, groping, circular movement with his hands, knowing that on every side were rats, ten, twenty, thirty, forty—God alone knew the number—surrounding him, closing in nearer and nearer, watching him with red eyes, licking their lips, certain of their prey.

PRIVATE SULLIVAN clutched at Lance-Corporal O'Grady's arm.

"Whist! What the divil's that, Terence?"

The two soldiers halted and listened.

The dug-out in which they stood, the fourth in succession which they had entered without going above ground, differed in no wise from the others they had ransacked; there was the same look of desolation, the same unwholesome smell of damp garments and decayed straw and rats, the same litter of equipment and scraps of food on floor and table, the same untidy bedding on the bunks built up, shipboard-fashion, one above the other against the walls.

But the deep stillness of the other rooms of this human warren, a stillness that had been broken only by the distant thunder of the guns, was gone. From close at hand there came a faint groaning as of one in deepest agony and the sound of slow and tired footsteps shuffling wearily to and fro.

"'Tis some one in another room," said O'Grady.

Sullivan gazed about him. The noise most surely came from the other side of the wall at the further end of the dug-out.

"Isn't that a door yonda?" he said suddenly. "Luk!"

They moved slowly toward the door which was built of the same thick timbers as those that lined the walls.

The moaning seemed fainter, the footsteps had stopped.

"What is it, Dan? Is it a German?"

"Open it quick!" said Sullivan.

O'Grady pulled at the wooden latch and stood aside as the door swung slowly inward, his rifle in his hands, ready for what might come.

Sullivan held up his candle and peered into the blackness.

"Howly Mither of God!" he cried and started back.

For standing in the dug-out, staring at him with wild, red-rimmed eyes and gray, corpse-like face, was a man muttering to himself, clad in torn, blood-stained khaki. Beside him stretched on a low bed, was a dead body, half-covered with a brown blanket. And on the floor were rats; a score, at least, all dead and mangled.

"By Jasus, 'tis Captain Kenyon," said O'Grady in a shocked whisper. "Him what we were thinking was killed yestiday!"

"For pity's sake!" said Sullivan hoarsely. "Luk, will ye! The inthrance is all shtopped up. Poor fella!"

"But did he not see that there was a door?" said O'Grady.

And as the two soldiers, bewildered and startled by what met their eyes, watched, the scarecrow whom they had followed into battle, their officer, gave a hoarse, shrill scream and with bloody hands flung himself on a huge gray rat which was crawling slowly away into the shadows.

"I've got you!" shouted the scarecrow. "I've got you, you old devil! You thought you'd escape, but you couldn't — you couldn't—you hell's fiend—we never give in—we——"

Then he stood up, the dead rat in his red hands, and began to laugh so strangely and so mirthlessly that the two soldiers shrank back out of his reach.

"What is it?" said O'Grady in a hushed voice. "What's he afther doing?"

"He's an orf'cer," said Sullivan, "an' a good man. Terence, there's been quare wurrk here this past night. We'd besht be gittin' him away at wance. Captain Kenyon, yer honor," he spoke gently and soothingly, as though to a child, "will yerself not come up into the fresh air, an' have a luk at the bhoys?"

The officer passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Kenyon," he said in a low voice. "Yes—of course, I'm Kenyon. I've been here—a long time, eh? In the dark, fighting—fighting with those devils."

But when they tried to lead him away he resisted.

"And leave him!" he pointed to the dead body. "With them!" He gave another wild laugh. "My God, no!"

He had fought with the rats for O'Hara's sake and he had won. Was he to hand over his friend now? That the dug-out had another entrance, that the door was hidden by the hanging clothes, that a push would have opened a way of escape, he neither knew nor cared. He had beaten off the rats and O'Hara was saved. Nothing else mattered.

Not until they had lifted O'Hara from the bed on which he had died and borne him through into the next dug-out and so on into another and up the steep steps into the open air did Kenyon feel that his work was done.

It was dawn, the sun had risen and was shining from a clear blue sky, soft white clouds touched with pink sailed slowly overhead, a faint breeze blew from the westward; the purple and violet and gold at a distant hillside showed up beyond the dark green woods in front; red poppies and white daisies nodded in the grass; everything was clean and fresh and beautiful.

Kenyon, conscious of a strange peace, stared about him. The dull thunder of the guns that never rested, night or day, and the dead lying in the chalk with covered faces, brought to his mind a suggestion of some past horror. He eyed the men in the trench distrustfully. Who were they? He did not know them. Had they seen him before, these dirty, unshaven men in khaki? He wondered. Perhaps, though they were friends. Perhaps they would share his triumph.

"Look!" he said. "Look here!" He held by its tail the big, gray rat. He laughed aloud. "See it! Isn't it a beauty? I killed it." His rage and terror returned. "You devil!" He shuddered with uncontrollable loathing. "You beast—take it away, quick—oh, my God! Some one—for God's sake!" His voice rose to a scream. "Take it away—quick, or it'll kill me."

Then, shaking off the spell that gripped him, he hurled the rat over the battered parapet and laughed triumphantly, staring from man to man, until all at once he broke off as if about to choke and, clutching at Sullivan's arm, began to weep, begging to be taken away from the trenches or they—he did not say who—would kill him.

"He was like that in the dug-out," said Sullivan dryly, "only not so bad."

"He's mad, that's what's the matther," said the company sergeant-major, "an' 'tis shell-shock that's afther doin' the damage—whin the dug-out was blown in on top of him. The besht orf'cer in the battalion, the bravest man iver I seen in it, an' cast yer eyes on him now! Dear, dear! Let's be gettin' him out o' this. Come, sorr, come with me. Sure, ye're all right now. There's no call to worry!"

The M. O., even before he had heard what had happened to the dug-out, said it was shell-shock, the worst case he had ever had the misfortune to see. Kenyon scarcely understood; he did not care what they called it; all he asked for was to be taken away from the war.

There was only the one thing to do; they sent him to England, a broken, white-faced wreck with terror lurking in his sunken eyes, a poor, sick man who cried weakly when left by himself with no one near at hand to call in case they, his enemies, found him.

THERE came a day when he was well enough to see his wife.

She sat by his bedside and held his hand in hers. Kenyon felt strangely comforted and yet ashamed, almost too ashamed to look her in the face and tell her he was happy now at last.

She was too good for him, he knew. He wondered, stabbed deep with remorse, why, why in the past dead years before mankind went mad, he had been so blind? Now it was too late. How could he, a coward, dare to hope that any woman, much less this perfect woman, could still love him? How could he, who had shown himself unfit to be a soldier, who had disgraced his regiment, hold up his head again? And he, a coward, had dared look down on poor O'Hara, the finest man God ever made!

It was not until Kenyon had left the hospital and had for three long weeks been forced by Fate to act a lie, that the truth came out.

On a still calm evening in September, he and his wife walked side by side between tall dark hedges of box. The sun had set in a blaze of glory and the sky still glowed crimson and gold in the west, rooks cawed sleepily in the elm-trees behind the house and from near at hand a thrush sang a last good night.

From time to time some irresistible impulse would urge Kenyon to glance over his shoulder, as though suspicious that something—he was stronger now, but he would not say what, even to himself—were following at his heels.

His wife slipped an arm through his.

"Old boy, what is it?"

And then he stopped and releasing her arm gently, stood studying the freshness of her beauty.

"What is it, Alan? Why are you looking at me like that?"

He pulled himself together. The part he played sickened him. Yet play it he must to the bitter end.

"You're too good for me, sweetheart."

"Too good!" said his wife. "You!"

The amazement she felt was expressed in her voice. She, too good for him! After what he had done and suffered for his country!

"Alan," she said softly, "what is it, dearest? Old boy, sometimes I wonder if you really understand how much you mean to me. You're everything I've got; everything. When you were out in France, fighting bravely, suffering all those hardships, I nearly died. I don't know now, dearest, how I lived through all those months of waiting. It was agony. Any day I might have heard what I dreaded. At any moment when I was safe at home, asleep, at dinner, shopping, you, my husband, might have been lying dead.

"I used to find myself thinking: 'Where is he now? What is he doing? Is he in battle?' And I would feel that my heart was breaking. It didn't matter where I was or with whom. And, Alan, I couldn't cry. I wasn't able to—not then. I suffered too much."

She hesitated, smiling a little, her eyes soft with tears.

"I thought I'd tell you, old boy, to let you know what you mean to me. If you had been killed, I'd have died. Life wouldn't have been worth living any longer. I'm not brave, dear. And I was so proud of you, dearest, so awfully proud of what you did. It isn't—isn't every woman that has a hero for a husband. It makes it worse, doesn't it, me, being such a coward?"

Kenyon felt that he was choking.

"A coward!" he muttered. "No, love, not that! You're no coward, love. My God! And I never knew—never. And you think I'm brave! You say you're proud of me! Doris, you're wrong—you've been wrong all along. Oh, my God! I wish—I wish——"

A longing to confess, to have her share his secret, surged over him. But he knew in his heart it would never be. Though the whole world should learn the truth, his wife must never know. He must keep his secret, hard though it might be.

* * *

HE SHIVERED and glanced once more over his shoulder into the purple shadows, afraid lest down the path between the tall dark hedges there might come stealing after him. . . .

His wife put her hands on his arms. In her voice was a sudden note of fear.

"Alan, what is it, love? Why are you looking like that? Hadn't you better come in? It's—it's getting a bit chilly."

"I'm not—not quite myself sometimes," he said hoarsely. "It's—" he found the lie ready to his lips, "it's those shells. I keep thinking every minute——"

"I understand. I know what it must have been, dear."

"I'm not fit to be your husband, Doris. I'm—I'm a wreck, now; good for nothing—good for nothing at all. I'm sorry for your sake, dear, but I can't help it. I wish I could. My soldiering's finished, and I'm not wanted—I'm scrapped. They won't send me out again—they know what I am. I'm not all that you think I am, Doris. Will you forgive me?"

She looked at him with a wistful expression. There was something he was hiding from her, some secret that was hers by right to share. He was in trouble, yet he dared not tell her what was wrong. That he, her husband, once so proud, so self-reliant, he, this quiet man with the lines of suffering in his face, could have been so brave in battle, and then, broken in health and spirit, could have come to her beseeching her pardon for what he had not done, was past all understanding. She felt strangely humble, yet glad to think that in spite of all he needed her.

"Alan, there's something wrong, I know. Why won't you tell me? Can't you trust me, love?"

And, as she watched him, she felt suddenly that the love she bore him was like a mother's love toward her little son. He was in trouble and in need of comfort. Was not that sufficient?

He had drawn back and was staring at her with the weary look she knew so well.

"Can't you tell me?" she repeated. "Why not?"

All thought of denial had vanished. She had said that something was wrong. Could he deny it? And yet he dared not tell. His pride had sealed his lips. Coward though he might be, to her he must be a hero until his dying day.

"No," he said, "I can't tell you, dearest."

And then something came rustling through the hedge, some animal. Kenyon uttered a hoarse cry of fear as a rat brushed against his leg and vanished headlong into the shadows.

"My God—it's found me. Doris—did you see? Doris, it's found me."

He shivered with terror, uncontrollable.

"Alan, what is it? Alan, dear, don't look like that, for pity's sake!"

The pressure of her hands on his steadied him and gave him strength. The love and pity in her eyes urged him to speak.

"I killed it," he said. "Yes, I did kill it, I remember now—in the dug-out. I must be mad, because if I killed it, then it can't —" Some thread seemed to snap and he broke off abruptly. "Did I frighten you, dearest? You understand now, though, don't you? I'm a coward, afraid of rats."

And then speaking in a low, monotonous voice, he told his story, hiding nothing, excusing nothing; he told of the dug-out and the explosion, his fight with the rats, his fear and O'Hara's death.

"I'm a broken man. I'll never be any use again. They said it was shell-shock. But it isn't. God, no! It's just that I'm afraid of rats. That's all, nothing but rats. I'd rather die a hundred deaths, I'd suffer anything, rather than face them again. It's true, Doris, I would. And they called me brave! Me! Why, Doris, I'm as big a coward as ever walked this earth!

"Do you know that I'm saying now what I thought I never could say—even to you? Do you wonder that I'm miserable and unhappy? Could I be anything else? I've lost everything; my pride, my manhood, and now—now, that you know, I've lost you. How could you bear me any respect after—after what I told you?"

The bitterness with which he ended brought the tears to her eyes.

"You're my husband," she said and she smiled tenderly. "Is not that sufficient? Need I say more than that? Alan, you've told me your secret, now I'll tell you mine."

"Yes," he said wearily. "Yes, dear."

"Darling, I loved you when you were strong and well and had little real need of me, you know that, don't you? But, Alan, I was always a little afraid of you, you were so clever! I loved you still more when you were far away in France, and I read all that you'd done and how brave you were, but it frightened me when I thought of the difference between us. But, dearest, now that you've come back to me, tired and worn out and ill, now that you've told me what you've suffered, I love you more than ever I did—and I think—I think you're the bravest man I ever heard of."

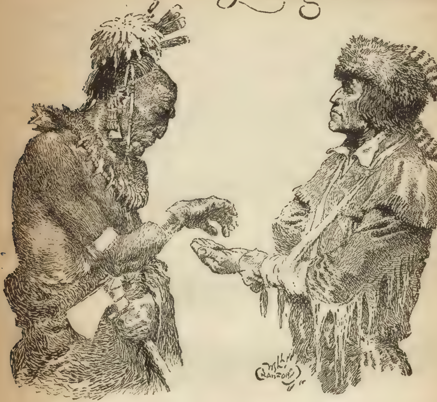
He stared at her in dumb amazement. Had she not understood what he had said, or must he put things even more plainly? He had made it clear that he was a coward, yet she still loved him! It was impossible, of course. How could she love a man who was afraid, not of shells, but of rats?

Then, with the same tender smile on her lips and her eyes shining, she put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him proudly.

"You're mine, Alan, and that's enough. Come, dear, it's getting dark. We'll go indoors."

RED STICKS

by Hugh Pendexter



Author of "A New Keeper of the Wampum," "The Raven Mocker," etc.

THE red news of St. Clair's defeat on the Wabash was being carried by the triumphant Miami along the Maumee to the east, and south to the Ohio. Little Turtle, whose fathers kindled the first fires at Detroit, had counted his second great coup over the whites. His defeat of General Harmar on the Maumee the preceding Fall, however, was not to be compared with this terrific punishment of St. Clair's army. And through the desolate November forests sped the exulting messengers chosen "to carry the red." The Miami were noted for swiftness of foot, and the red news radiated rapidly. Chickasaw and Cherokee, south of the Kentucky wedge of civilization separating them from their Northern brothers, would take heart again and forget old feuds in a common assault on the white settlements. Once the red sticks proclaimed the great victory to the Eastern tribes old hopes would blaze up.

Abreast of the red sticks raced the lean and lanky Kentucky scout, Joe Bund, striving to outstrip the red death and warn the settlements and lonely cabins along the Ohio that hell was loosed, that the son of a Miami chief and a Mohican mother was reaching his tomahawk over the fair country.

The Miami called Bund the Eagle, Kendawa. He had lost precious time by sticking to the fighting till the retreat sounded and became a ghastly rout. It was midday of that fateful November fourth before he drew clear of the ruck of fugitives. And even then, although realizing many lives depended upon his fleet feet, he had tarried to answer some pitiful call for help where some lone soldier was dying slowly. He knew he should have stolen away in the first gray hour of fighting, before selected bands of Miami warriors could be dispatched for surprise attacks. But he was human and he had lingered till every vestige of hope was gone. As a result he was not the first to leave the stricken field.

All about him the silent woods were sprinkled with the swift-stealing enemy, and he could only hope there were none directly ahead. That some had passed his way was made evident by the bodies of the slain militiamen he occasionally came upon. These poor devils had fled at the first assault only to be overtaken. If a few won clear to spread the alarm their cowardice was partly atoned for.

For weapons the scout retained his knife and war-ax; for sustenance, a pouch of parched corn which he munched as he ran. For hours he sped through the interminable forest before coming to a settlement. This consisted of half a dozen new cabins on Stillwater Creek, erected a few months before when it was believed that St. Clair's expedition would make the country safe.

He groaned in deep relief as a tall man, Kentucky rifle in hand, emerged from the nearest cabin. He had feared the Indians had made the creek ahead of him. The settler on recognizing the forest dress of the scout dipped up a gourd of water from a pail and ran forward to meet the runner, his eyes lighting wildly. A woman appeared in the doorway behind him, her face strained and white, two children clinging to her skirts.

"Sainclair's licked ter hell!" were Bund's first words. "Been afeerd I'd git here too late. The Injuns are on both sides of ye but I reckon the path due south is open. Tell yer neighbors! Strike for the Ohio! Little Turtle'll be swarmin' down this crick in no time."

The man stared stupidly; the woman reacted instantly. Uttering a sharp command to the children she darted back into the cabin to make up some light packs. The children ran to the other cabins shrilly shrieking—

"Injuns! Injuns!"

The man shivered and nervously examined his rifle and glared apprehensively toward the forest wall of naked branches.

"Thought Sainclair was goin' to give 'em their needin's," he muttered as the scout leaned against a stump, pumping for breath.

Bund held out the gourd and while the settler's shaking hand was filling it he rapidly informed:

"Everything done wrong. Harmar told him he was in for a lickin'. I told him the same thing when he lost so much time at this very crick. Why, afore we left here the six-months' men was bleatin' to go home. He never oughter took any six-months' men for Injun fightin'. Right after we quit here the bread give out. Week afore we struck the river plain near St. Mary's some of the militia deserted. Colonel Hamtranck's first regiment o' reg'lars—our best troops—was sent after 'em.

"Then we was outfitted poor. Lots o' guns was no good an' some of the powder would scarcely burn. Sainclair was so sick he couldn't git on his hoss without help. I was out on a scout when the army struck the Wabash and camped. That was night afore last. And Sainclair didn't have any guides worth shucks, and they didn't even know they'd reached the Wabash. Think o' that! I got back yesterday mornin' when it was still cold and dark, and was makin' my report to Major Ouldham—they got him—when the devils jumped us, more'n a thousand of 'em, Little Turtle in command. General Butler was killed——"

"Gawd! One of our best officers," gasped the settler.

"He had lots of comp'ny," grimly assured Bund, tightening his belt. "Inside o' four hours we dropped nine hundred men in a patch no bigger'n ten acres. For miles the woods is plastered with everything a scared man can heave away. Means hell for the Ohio. The heathen's carryin' the red sticks to the Alleghany and Kentucky. Better help yer woman hurry up a bit. I'm off."

He darted away just in time to escape a dozen men and women running forward to question him. Although young in years he was a veteran in border craft. He could not understand how commanders could proceed as had Harmar and St. Clair. He wondered if the lesson would ever be learned. The Braddock massacre on the

Monongahela had taught military leaders nothing, it would seem.

He had served with the Harmar expedition when the Miami villages at the head of the Maumee were destroyed. At that time he believed he followed a leader who knew how to fight. Then he had seen the militia colonel's rash lust for battle override Harmar's judgment, with the men rushing into two deadly ambuscades. That experience and this overwhelming defeat of St. Clair sickened him with the conviction that the Ohio country was now closed to settlers for many years.

Light as a shadow he threaded the forest, skirted marshes, and crossed unnamed streams on driftwood or by swimming the icy waters, his gaze ever seeking a pioneer's smoke. All about him were speeding the red sticks. At any moment he might encounter the van of the raiders, for several bands had left the river ahead of him. Within another twenty-four hours the whole Ohio country, from the river to the great lakes, would be blazing with triumphant council fires. And he shuddered as he thought of those not fortunate enough to die in battle.

IT WAS on the edge of evening—and he had run like a machine since warning the Stillwater Creek settlement—that he came to halt. He had barely pushed back his light fur cap when an arrow clipped through his left arm and pinned it to his deerskin hunting shirt. He dropped behind a black walnut instantly, and his assailant sounded a yell of triumph and leaped from cover. With the resilience of tempered steel the scout sprang to his feet, his right arm whipping back and then forward; and the Miami went down with the war-ax buried in his forehead.

Without pausing to recover his ax Bund resumed his flight, breaking off the arrowhead and withdrawing the shaft as he ran. With his teeth and free fingers he bandaged the wound and fashioned a sling of rawhide thong.

"I'll be cussed if I ain't fetched up with 'em. Pretty good runnin', and they havin' hours' start o' me. Little Turtle started 'em south the minute he see he was winnin'. Now to break through and take the lead. Reckon that cuss's war-whoop is drawin' 'em in on me from all directions."

That this conclusion was warranted was shown by a shrill, ululating call in the west. More ominous was the answering signal on the scout's left, for it was closer at hand. The gathering darkness shortened his line of vision and forced him to lessen his pace. The war-cry of the warrior he had slain was drawing the savages in to investigate why he did not answer their signals.

Now that finesse must take the place of speed Bund halted and arranged the sling about his wounded arm and briefly pondered over his predicament. The advance guard of victorious warriors, shrewdly rushed toward the Ohio by Little Turtle instead of being allowed to tarry for the terrible scenes following the massacre, was well abreast if not entirely surrounding him. These would be picked warriors, traveling fast and furious to prevent fugitives from warning the river settlements.

The scout had lost some four hours by remaining to fight the rear-guard action. The dead Indian's war-cry had advertised the discovery of a victim; his failure to sound the scalp-halloo had told the rest of the story.

"They know he's wiped out, and now they'll try to bottle me up," Bund told himself as he felt his way with his feet through a dark grove. "Reckon I'm a mighty poor Eagle—reckon Sainclair's lickin' will send this neck o' the woods to the devil a-flyin'."

The black growth gave way to an opening as Bund discovered by the sudden reappearance of stars in the frosty heavens. He crouched warily and cursed his ill-luck. The opening was an additional handicap. To make a detour would cost precious time and probably throw him into the clutches of the Miami. To advance was to discard his last defense—secrecy—providing the warriors in the rear should be close at hand. And he believed they were.

A sharp yelp on his right, quickly answered by a similar signal on his left, forced his decision. But what put new life into his heels was the repetition of the call a short distance behind him. Without hesitating longer he scudded into the opening.

He had covered only a few rods when he struck a patch of corn, and his heart quailed in anguish. Corn meant a cabin, and a cabin with the Miami already upon it.

"I'll be cussed if they don't have their chance, such as it is," he grunted, dropping to his knees to locate the squat outlines against the skyline.

There it stood, black and silent, an outpost of the white man's hunger for home and land, symbolic of the whole bloody business of remaking a continent. Hordes of adventurers had come and gone up and down the Ohio and Mississippi without leaving a trace, except as rusty bits of war-harness and broken bones were sometimes found in the forest mold. But such wanderers had come for gold and their impress on the country was as transitory as the trails their feet had made.

This small structure of laboriously hewn logs spelled permanency, something to be defended and fought for. And, God! What dismay would his message bring to many such humble habitations were he spared to continue his mission.

He ran to the door and his flesh crawled when he found it wide open. Falling on his knees he swept his free hand over the floor of hard-packed earth.

"There ain't no one here," he whispered, his dread of finding silent forms dropping from him. "Thank God! Some o' the deserters got through and fetched the word."

Now that he was in the cabin he became conscious of an awful thirst. It seemed as though his lungs would burst if he did not find water. He located a gourd but it was empty. There was a kettle in the fireplace, also empty. By the feel of the ashes he knew the fire had died out a good twelve hours back. The occupants probably had fled early that morning, warned by soldiers who had deserted the night before the battle. Next his exploring hand fell upon a tiny moccasin, and he knew frantic parents were being handicapped in their flight by a little child. With peculiar persistency for detail his mind instantly decided the child was a girl.

But of drink there was nothing. He straightened and bumped his head on a rough shelf. His right hand flew to it at once and he grunted softly as his fingers closed about a small, wide-necked bottle.

Hungrily tearing off the birch-bark cover with his teeth he was rewarded by a faint aroma of whisky. He tipped the bottle eagerly but his lips remained dry. He was puzzled as well as disappointed. The bottle was partly filled with something that smelled of whisky. He shook it gently and felt its contents move. Despite his desperate situation he took time to place the bottle on the floor and insert two fingers. He drew forth some kind of fruit. Placing it in his mouth he chewed it ecstatically, murmuring—"Wild cherries put up in whisky, only the whisky's most gone."

He hastily placed several more of the little cherries in his mouth, intending to finish the bottle, when a soft movement outside the cabin warned him he had tarried too long. To the untrained ear it might have been the beating of a night bird's wing, or the almost inaudible footfall of a wolf. But Bund interpreted it correctly. Hastily tipping the bottle upside down in his palm he caught the preserved fruit and dropped it into a pocket of his hunting shirt. Then he drew his knife and stepped to the door.

A low signal rippled 'round the opening, telling him the cabin was inside the circle. One or more savages had come to investigate the small building. The scout stepped to the left of the door so that his knife-hand might have free play, and waited.

There was no further sound but he soon discerned a dark object on a level with his eyes and within a foot of him. A warrior had thrust his head over the threshold. The scout detected his suppressed breathing. Motionless and holding his own breath he drew back the knife, hoping the savage would withdraw and report the place deserted. The warrior made a guttural sound and began sniffing curiously.

Bund immediately guessed the truth. The Miami had caught the scent of the preserved fruit and the faint odor of whisky. He grunted joyously and stepped over the threshold his right hand falling on Bund's face. He essayed to leap back, a shriek of warning pealing from his lips, but Bund lunged fiercely. The savage went to his knees, the knife buried in his throat. Over the writhing body leaped the scout only to run into the arms of several Indians.

The shouts of triumph quickly changed to the death-cry as the Miami stumbled over the body of the dead savage. A fire sprang up as if by magic, and by its flare Bund read a fearful purpose in the ferociously painted faces.

"Kendawa!" exulted one of his captors, seizing his right hand and holding it over a blazing roll of birch bark.

"Yes, yer dog!" gritted Bund and making no effort to release his hand, but showing his contempt by spitting a cherry into the face of his torturer.

Then in the Miami dialect:

"If your chief's mother hadn't been a Mohican you'd be running toward the setting sun today. Miami men are old women. You are fleet of foot as the antelope because you've been chased from your hunting grounds by Potawatomi, Kickapoo, Shawnee, and every other tribe that's wanted your land. You have run away so much——"

He ceased his harangue to gape in amazement. The burning bark had been removed from his hand before it could do any harm, and his captors were ignoring him to stare at something held in the palm of his torturer.

It was the preserved cherry, tiny and firm and round and red. Its effect had been more striking than a bullet. The circle of morose faces were glaring at it incredulously. At last the savage holding it gingerly raised it to his nose and sniffed; then placed it in his mouth. The circle grunted and waited for his decision.

"A fresh, ripe cherry," he announced, licking his lips over the suggestion of whisky accompanying the fruit.

Bund, who had only hoped his raillery would bring a merciful death by tomahawk or knife, now understood that the cherry was a miracle to them. Taking advantage of the flickering light and the absorbed attention of his captors he managed to fish out two of the tiny fruit and pass them to his mouth unnoticed.

"An evil spirit whispers to Papakeecha," protested a warrior. "Cherries have not ripened for many moons. Snow is on the way. Do flowers grow in Winter? Do birds mate after the leaves fall? There are no ripe cherries."

Bund broke in:

"Flat Belly has heard no evil spirit. He has seen the magic of Kendawa, whose manito is mighty."

"The Eagle flies over the ground, but is he a magician?" demanded the skeptic.

"The white man's manito works when he is needed. Kendawa is a magician," replied Bund; and he expelled a cherry into the face of the last speaker.

The skeptic caught the fruit and held it close to the flaming bark to study it. He found it a bright red reminder of early Summer. There was no questioning its appearance. To make certain the savage delicately split it with his knife and disclosed the pit. As a final test he plopped it into his mouth. The others watched him with breathless interest and observed he nodded with grim enjoyment as his palate was tickled by the suggestion of fire-water, and was soothed by the piquancy of the tart fruit, doubly delectable now Winter was swinging down from the North.

"Prob'ly the first redskins to taste a wild cherry out of season," thought Bund.

"Kendawa's manito is mighty," conceded the warrior after swallowing the cherry. "We have only known him as one who runs swiftly. Now he is a magician, he shall show his magic to Michikinikwa."

The scout grew cold. He had no desire to face Little Turtle, who had won highest place among the Miami despite the fact his father's rank had helped him none. For, by the Indian rule of the Miami of tracing ancestry through the mother, he was a Mohican. He had gained place and fame while young because of his unusual merits. To impose on such would require the utmost nerve and finesse.

"He shall escape the torture so long as he spits ripe cherries," declared Flat Belly.

Bund winced. If not discovered his stock of cherries could not exceed more than forty or fifty, he estimated. If found upon him the miracle would lose nothing by the discovery, but he would be commanded to instantly refill the pocket.

"Let him spit more cherries now," urged a savage, whose wrinkled nostrils evidenced he had caught the subtle scent of the preservative.

"Kendawa's manito works not at the word of a Miami squaw," haughtily informed Bund.

The savage caught his right hand and closed his teeth on a finger, intending to bite off a nail, but Flat Belly took umbrage and pulled him back, reminding:

"He is my prisoner. Mine was the first hand to touch him."

By this time warriors were pouring in from the forest, the word having been passed that a mighty white magician had been captured; a man who held the seasons in his mouth and could spit ripe fruit whenever he would, although it be the moon of honking geese. Flat Belly quickly observed he was an object of unusual importance among his brothers.

To possess a captive whose manito controlled the seasons was a unique distinction. His was the first hand to fall on the scout as he leaped through the doorway. Not even Little Turtle could take his prisoner from him without upsetting Indian etiquette and usage. Various warriors now began bidding for the scout, eagerly offering their fresh scalps, their shares of coats, powder-horns and rifles gathered from the rout.

But all these things Flat Belly could secure for himself any time, now the red man was to conquer the white race. Twice already Little Turtle had furnished the Miami with rare pickings. But only the gods sent prisoners who could spit ripe cherries on the brink of Winter and embroider the gift with the aroma of Pennsylvania whisky. To Bund's great relief Flat Belly scorned all offers. Tying the scout's hand behind his back and placing a slip-noose about his neck the Indian drove him into the forest, making north.

Bund's veins grew hot with hope; not for himself but for the settlements along the Ohio. His capture had halted the advance of the enemy; for he was satisfied every member of the scouting party within reach of the tremendous news a white magician had been captured was following him and his proud captor. It was characteristic of the Indian mind to become unmindful of the war party's original purpose in hastening south.

"I'll be cussed if they can do any more'n burn me," he grimly decided. "Mebbe it's better I'm caught. I might 'a' led 'em full-bent on to the little gal and her folks. They have a extry chance to make the Ohio and they'll carry the word of alarm as well as me. What with 'em and the deserters who warned 'em the settlers oughter have time to cross into Kentucky."

LITTLE TURTLE was exceedingly wroth with his warriors because of their failure to push on to the Beautiful River. His anger was tempered somewhat when he learned their reason for hastening back. They had captured a white magician whose manito allowed him to transpose the seasons. He could make ripe cherries to come back when he would and the grass to grow green and lush though it be deep Winter.

He could provide pasturage for the buffalo the year 'round and stop their wandering far South in search of feed. Surely none but the Miami ever had captured such a prisoner. To be sure he was the personal property of Flat Belly, but his works must redound to the advantage and advancement of the entire Miami people.

Little Turtle did not believe these fantastic rumors, yet his curiosity was sharply aroused.

"Bring the white man to me," he commanded.

Flat Belly proudly led forth his captive, after removing the ropes from his neck and hand. Bund stood composed of bearing in the middle of the wide circle of interested warriors, his wounded arm hanging at his side, two fingers of the right hand being hooked in the pocket of his hunting shirt. Little Turtle was disappointed and harshly demanded:

"What is he called? He is not even a chief. I saw him fighting among the soldiers."

"Kendawa," spoke up Bund.

"So Michikinikwa has caught an Eagle," sneered the chief. "The others were clumsy game." And he paused to allow his proud gaze to range over the heaps of plunder awaiting distribution. "Michikinikwa has heard the eagle makes medicine."

Ignoring the irony in the chief's tone Bund gravely assured:

"Straight tongues have spoken to Michikinikwa. The manito of the Eagle is very strong."

"But the words fell strange on Michikinikwa's ears, for they spoke of magic that tosses the seasons back and forth like pebbles in the hand of a child."

"They were true words," haughtily declared Bund, now nerved to play his rôle to the limit.

"And yet this mighty manito of the white man did not help him to escape the Miami," reminded the chief.

"His capture brought back Michikinikwa's warriors. His manito willed that one should be taken that many might escape," countered the scout, palming two cherries before allowing his right hand to drop at his side.

Little Turtle's face for a moment grimaced with fury as he realized the truth of this. But his voice was gentle as he continued:

"It is said the white man's magic can make the pawpaw and black walnut put forth new leaves the year 'round."

"Even that is easy for the manito of the Eagle," quietly declared Bund.

"When crooked tongues speak to Michikinikwa he pulls them out by the roots," warned the chief, extending his sinewy fingers suggestively.

"It is good," said Bund.

He could feel the impact of the savage gaze of the warriors massed behind him, and, from the tail of his eye, observed the rapt attention of those on either side of the chief. All were rigid and silent as they watched the unfolding of the drama. Nor was there one who failed to realize that Little Turtle was aroused to a mighty pitch of fury at the calm bearing of the prisoner and his colossal claims. And Bund knew he must win out or suffer as no prisoner of the Miami had yet suffered.

"Can Kendawa make corn grow?" Little Turtle taunted.

"His manito can make corn grow *now*," readily answered Bund.

The circle of warriors moved uneasily. A climax dearly to the liking of the red man was at hand. In dramatic values it surpassed the stake. Nor was there lacking frank admiration for the bold demeanor of the scout. Even Little Turtle was impelled to approve of a man who composedly claimed so much.

"Will the Eagle's manito make corn grow now?" he softly asked and leaned forward to catch the answer.

Bund shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Michikinikwa, of the Toonpaoh clan, my manito is ready to tell you things of much more importance than the growing of corn."

The use of the Mohican term for "Turtle," the clan of the chief, was a subtle touch and did not fail to register an effect on the chief. It betokened the white man's knowledge of his eventful and ambitious history; it appealed to his pride that his ancestry, through mother-right, should be intimately known by his enemies. But no flattery could cause him to overlook the scout's evasion, and his eyes lighted in triumph.

Throwing off his air of restraint he sternly commanded—

"Come, if you are a magician, make corn grow."

The encircling warriors hunched forward, their eyes glistening. The fate of the white man was ensconced within the next few seconds.

"The corn is scarcely harvested. If the Eagle showed green corn in his talons Michikinikwa would say it was some trick. Why should the mighty manito of Kendawa do child's play when its tongue is heavy with grave words for the Miami?" was the scout's answer.

A deep sigh of disappointment at such a tame conclusion rose from the spectators; and in fierce triumph Little Turtle cried out:

"Your tongue is crooked. Your manito is an old man. He is very lame. He falls down and can not get up. Papakeecha, put this man to the torture."

Bund turned aside his head as though to show his contempt and stared away to where the forest crown and leaden clouds met. He had but one card to play and he knew he must play it at the apex of the situation. His knowledge of the Indian character had warned him he must assert the dignity and independence of his manito before performing any works. And insofar as Little Turtle ignored the tribal law concerning the fate of prisoners, by so much would he weaken himself to the corresponding advantage of the captive.

"This man is a liar. Put him to the torture at once, Papacheeka," passionately repeated the chief.

Bund whistled softly and continued gazing at the somber sky. Flat Belly's face became convulsed with rage at the command. The warriors moved about uneasily. The white man was Flat Belly's prisoner, and although all envied him, yet there was the law of the tribe.

"Michikinikwa is a mighty war chief and his brothers are proud to follow him," rumbled Flat Belly. "But the white man is my prisoner. If he makes corn grow, Michikinikwa shall have the first ears—a gift from Papakeecha. The white man is my prisoner according to the law of the Miami."

His words met with low notes of approval. A wild desire to bury his war-ax in the stubborn Flat Belly's head filled the heart of Little Turtle, but he betrayed nothing of his feeling. He held his high position because of his ability to study situations from all sides. He knew his leadership would endure only so long as he was successful. He could not compel the service of any warriors.

The Indian fought when he chose and under whom he chose, and did he tire of a project he could abandon it at any time. A warrior's dream could disrupt an extensive organization for offensive war. And a war-chief without a following had no prestige. Little Turtle always spoke of the Miami people as "I," but there were lengths to which he could not go.

He inclined his head gravely as Flat Belly finished, and then addressed Bund, saying:

"Your manito has a message for me—the Miami. After it is spoken perhaps he will grow corn for me."

"I bring a message to Michikinikwa," stoutly replied Bund, believing the first crisis had passed.

"Speak, Kendawa; but we talk without belts."

The chief's words were smoothly spoken, but they contained the reminder he was committing himself none as to his future conduct.

"My manito bids me say to you, oh, Michikinikwa, that the time draws near when you will talk with peace belts to the Thirteen Fires (the thirteen colonies) and will be glad to do so."

The boldness of this speech and its insolence, in view of the unburied dead along the Wabash, wrung little exclamations of anger from the assembly.

"When I talk with the Thirteen Fires they will accept my terms or die out," hissed Little Turtle, trembling with rage. "It will take many snows to bury the dead the white men have left along the Wabash."

"Yet you will carry to the Thirteen Fires only the *mnoti*."

"The Miami may carry the bag containing peace belts to the Thirteen Fires as your lying manito says, but it will be only after Kendawa's magic has changed the seasons back and forth, as some foolish warriors seem to believe it can do," was the fierce retort.

Bund thrilled. He had worked the scene up to the one climax that might save him and had forced the chief to lead the way throughout. Slowly swinging his gaze back till it rested on Little Turtle's fierce countenance he demanded:

"Michikinikwa speaks of the seasons as though they were fixed in their places. Cherries blossomed and ripened months ago. Are there any ripe cherries now? Can the Miami warriors go forth and bring back ripe cherries to their war-chief?" As he awaited an answer he folded his hands before him, passing the preserved fruit into his left.

"The wild geese fill the gray sky," sullenly replied the chief. "The beaver has cut his wood for Winter. There are no ripe cherries."

As Little Turtle ceased speaking Bund took a dramatic step forward and extended his wounded arm, with the hand held palm up. Little Turtle stared as though hypnotized at the two ripe cherries thus revealed. His startled eyes were raised to meet the calm glance of the white man. Very slowly, as though held back by caution, he reached forth and gingerly took the fruit and fingered it gently.

He was amazed to find it was genuine to all appearances. He bit into one of the cherries and examined the pit, while his warriors held their breath. There were clever Indian magicians, some very skilful in legerdemain; but there was none who could produce ripe cherries in November. Little Turtle had watched them make plants grow and flower and bear fruit, but always in the shadows near some smoking camp-fire, aided and abetted by their blankets. And in all such instances plant, fruit and flower were artificial and would not bear investigation.

Although he was much more astute than his followers he still was an Indian and unable to doubt the evidence of his senses. He had tasted one cherry and found it to be genuine. He ate the other and enjoyed the relish.

"What words has the great Michikinikwa to say to the Eagle's manito now?" demanded the scout in a stentorian voice, drawing himself haughtily erect and hooking his hand into his hunting-shirt pocket. "Which is greater medicine? To make corn grow when the harvest season is just over, or to bring the moon of cherries into the moon of wild geese?"

Low murmurs of approval ran 'round

the circle. Flat Belly's magician had vindicated his medicine.

Little Turtle slowly confessed—

"The manito of Kendawa is mighty."

"Michikinikwa speaks wise words. It is well. And remember, that as surely as you have eaten ripe cherries when snow is in the air, just so surely will you carry peace belts to the Thirteen Fires."

And with this forceful prophecy Bund raised his right hand above his head and scattered a shower of the fruit over Flat Belly and the warriors about him.

The effect of this demonstration was overwhelming. It left Little Turtle rigid and voiceless. The warriors lost their reserve and grunted loudly at the prodigality of the Eagle's manito. Flat Belly dropped on his knees to gather up the fruit and cram it into his slit of a mouth.

Greatly disturbed at the scout's words and at this further miracle Little Turtle, on recovering his power of speech, directed:

"Papakeecha, take the white magician away. His manito is mighty."

IN ACCEPTING the command of the third expedition against the Miami and allied tribes General Wayne, "Mad Anthony," conferred much with President Washington on Indian warfare and profited thereby. He refused to accept six-months' men, or any who were not Americans. He gave special attention to bayonet and broadsword drill and refused to take the field till his legion had been trained for two years for the bloody work ahead.

But when he finally struck the combined forces of the Indians on the Maumee he smashed the confederacy within sixty minutes of fighting, thereby cementing the United States' hold on the Northwest Territory. Among the delegates from the various Indian nations to confer with General Wayne at Greenville in the Summer of 1795 was the famous Little Turtle.

He spoke eloquently for the Miami and was answered generously by Wayne. Ninety chiefs and delegates, representing twelve tribes, signed the treaty, swearing perpetual peace and placing their people under the protection of the United States. The success of the lengthy conference was as great a triumph as was the last battle on the Maumee. Throughout the sessions Scout Bund stood behind Wayne, serving as interpreter. No signs of recognition passed between him and Little Turtle.

But after the treaty was signed and Little Turtle was about to return to his people he halted before the scout and said:

"Kendawa's manito is mighty. Michikinikwa has brought peace belts to the Thirteen Fires even as was said. Does Kendawa still have ripe cherries out of season?"

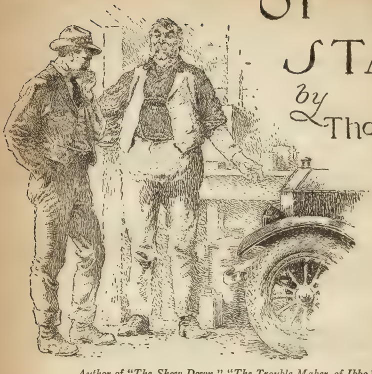
"Not since the young English officer ransomed him for a keg of rum from Papakeecha at Detroit. Now the peace bag has been opened between Michikinikwa and the Big Wind (Wayne) Kendawa's manito has no need for magic. Michikinikwa is now my brother."

"Michikinikwa salutes his brother, the Eagle. I am the last to sign the peace treaty and I will be the last to break it."

With this sententious declaration he strode into the forest. And history records that his tongue was straight and that for the remainder of his years he was faithful to his new allegiance.

A WARD OF THE STATE

by Thomas S. Miller



Author of "The Show-Down," "The Trouble-Maker of Ibbo," etc.

BILL WATKINS was deceptive; soft of speech by reason of tuning his tongue to the musical vowels of the "greasers" and "dagoes" he caressed with inoffensive oaths in the rock pit of the cement mill in the Pescadero Mountains, patient through long handling of raw unskilled labor, and with blue, twinkling, honor eyes he passed at first sight for "easy." But Bill drew down a hundred and fifty per, was in line for the superintendent's job at thirty-one, and had no weaknesses worth the mention, unless it were a fondness for poker, if it can be called a weakness in one who played for the game.

"There are just three ways of digging up the man within the man," he was wont to say. "One is to go and shut yourself up with him twelve months in a cabin, which is apt to be tedious; another is to get him so full of licker that his guards drop away and the man comes out naked, which ain't amusing; the third and best is to sit in with him at poker."

Bill's hobby was to know men. Mrs. Goodyear, the superintendent's wife, lectured him on his "gambling." She was deceived. Bill was no gambler. So was Adolf Olsen deceived. Adolf ran a rake-off game under police protection at his road-house just across the Santa Cruz—San Mateo county-line. Adolf was a big, big Swede who thought he was wise.

When Bill off-saddled one Saturday evening at his road-house and invited the gentry lounging hopefully around to a "smile" Adolf's saucer-blue eyes took an inventory. He inventoried corduroy pants with a lump left pocket from which Bill carelessly fisted a loose handful of gold and silver, an unbuttoned vest held loosely over a flannel shirt by a gold chain chunky enough to float a liberty loan, a right top pocket bulging with cigars and a left that did duty as traveling toilet-bag, exposing a toothbrush, razor, comb, lather-brush.

His hat was a soft wide-awake air-holed with buckshot and completely encircled with red-cross badges at a dollar a throw. Adolf was tagged with the Kanuri proverb, "He sees with the eyes only," meaning that the gray stuff was not on the job; that he was too easily fooled by mere appearances. He saw a lamb come to the slaughter and indulged an extensive grin that displayed rock-crushing molars proportionate to the rest of him.

"I didn't get your name, party?" he invited as he decorated the bar.

"Watkins—Bill. Here's a go, boys."

Adolf noted that Bill was very moderate with the whisky bottle. Bill noted that Adolf did not treat back. He stowed the notation away and swept wistful eyes over a green baize table. Adolf read the sign of the times. Saturday night is synonymous with payroll the long length and narrow breadth of California. It was Adolf's business to divorce wages from their careless owners. Telepathically Bill, Adolf, a logger and an Italian artichoke-grower gravitated to the table.

At 12 o'clock Adolf closed the bar and continued the sessions in the house. It was worth continuing, so blessedly goodnaturedly did Bill Watkins loose. For that matter Adolf would have been perfectly content to continue the game for the dollar-per-jack-pot rake-off to the house and the drink orders. It was the drink orders that made the first ripple in the serenity of the straw boss. Bill fell foul of a distrustful habit Adolf had of gathering up his money before leaving the table to serve drinks.

"Nobody ain't going to get away with your pile, Olson," he politely remonstrated.

"I don't believe in laying temptation around too promiscuous," grinned Adolf, but must have given the point consideration, for he went to a door that opened on stairs and bawled:

"Alice—Alice! Come down and 'tend bar."

Presently there appeared a girl with rebellion stamped on her face and expressed in the laggard movements of her strong, supple body. Bill accepted the innovation with patient displeasure, covertly eying, sizing her up. Her face figured around seventeen, but her body had the physical development of a young woman. She could be no relation of Olsen, who was as blond as any savage that came out of the land of the Vikings; a brunette with close-cropped chestnut hair, matching eyes that could be saucy, if they had anything to be saucy over, but were now sleepy and angry, a tremulous, wilful little mouth and a nose one couldn't find fault with.

She handled the liquor as she might handle a dead snake. Bill fretted inwardly, but managed to throttle his feelings, until along toward 2 A. M., when the tired droop of her body moved him to pull the string for a mild toot.

"This ain't no time nor place nor job for a girl. I votes Miss Alice to bed."

"When I want your advise how to run my business I'll ask for it, Mr. Watkins," said Adolf, and thought the call-down got by, so thoughtfully quiet did Bill return his attention to the game.

Bill was getting sore on another count besides the girl. Adolf had won handsomely and was laying back on his winnings. If the jackpot opened high he couldn't be tempted in on a pair of aces, and when he was in he checked the bet, and if called, laid down a full house or fours with an irritating display of molars. He piled his winnings in nice orderly piles and had a damnably tantalizing way of wolfing the coin with his eyes and raising them with clumsy-jointed fingers and shedding them down lingeringly, lovingly, with a soft metallic click that was evidently music to his miserly soul.

"——!" growled Bill, and promptly apologized to the girl. "Of all the piker poker-players and ground-hogs! I'd as lief toss craps with a coon up a back alley."

"I ain't in this for my health," grinned Adolf.

"Where's the game if we all lay back?" demanded Bill.

"You ain't got nothing to lay back on," Adolf argued practically.

"You're in it for the game, ain't you?"

"I'm in it to win," Adolf replied with simple conviction.

Bill's eyes suddenly lost their humorous twinkle. He pushed back his chair and shook out cramped legs, rising.

"Well, it's cost me eighty plunks to get a line on your play. I've got three plunks to my name and a sorrel to take me home." He picked up three dollars. "Here, Miss Alice—" he pressed the money into her reluctant hand—"buy yourself a real petticoat. That gunnysack makeshift don't belong in this century. Olsen, we'll adjourn till next Saturday."

He gave the logger and the artichoke

grower a friendly nod and went to the stables, saddled, mounted and rode off under a sprinkling of morning stars that tied knots in itself in its steep climb.

SHE DID not make the Saturday date. The superintendent was called up to the San Francisco office and he had to be on the job. But he got away at dawn on Sunday, reaching the roadhouse before breakfast. Riding the sorrel 'round to stables, he suddenly drew rein on a startling phenomenon.

Alice was at the wash-tub—on Sunday, Bill thought savagely. That, however, was not the startling part of it. The thing that made him draw rein and breath was her action. She was wringing a man's undershirt—a giant's undershirt—in her hands with a ferocity quite out of keeping with the blue Sabbath skies and green-patched world of mountain and valley. Then she savagely shook it out and in one temper-strengthened tear ripped it from collar to hem, flung it in the dust under her feet and jumped on it, to the tune of three explosive damns.

"Now, now," purred Bill. "That ain't nice—not from a lady."

She swung 'round, her eyes full of fight.

"Go and mind your own business!" she snapped.

She glared at him like a wild animal, ten seconds, perhaps, then she flung her skirt over her head, exposing a shameless gunnysack petticoat, and sobbed as if dreams and romance and joy were come to an end.

Bill slid from his saddle and approached warily.

"Aw come, Miss Alice," he crooned. "Come, now, let up. Just stop a moment and take a think. Kind o' all in, eh? Work late at night and early o' morning. I guess I know. They tried up at the mill to run in twelve-hour shifts, week days and Sundays, and was always bawling about the labor problem because the boys lit out soon's they had a stake. Why don't you quit?"

An answer came muffled through the skirt.

"I mustn't. They'd catch me and send me to the correction school. I'm a ward of the State."

"S-o—" mused Bill, gaining time, for ward of the State was something outside of his experience and comprehension. He took a toothpick from his ear and chewed thoughtfully on it.

"Why didn't you buy that petticoat I gave you the money for?" he asked by way of opener.

"He—" she dropped the skirt from her stormy face to jerk a thumb toward the house—"is my legal guardian. I haveta give up to him."

"Well, what's eating you this morning particular? Kind o' all in? Don't look at me so all-fired. Can't you make it out I'm your big, big brother, or, say, le's have a little make-believe you're Cinderella and I'm the fairy godmother on the job. Where do you hail from?"

"Over to the Pescadero Mountains."

"Got relatives there?"

"An uncle getting out ties."

Bill cast away a mangled toothpick and took another.

"*M'mm.* And you kept cabin for him?"

"I ran away."

"So—sure you did. Ran away from the old woodchopper and his demijohn of dago red and cusses. Wanted to see the great big wide world beyond the mountains; kind of sick of getting it second-hand from stories, eh? Poor li'l' girl!"

"I ain't a poor little girl," she fired back with spirit. "And if I did run away what business is it of yourn?"

"When a gal serves licker till morning and is at the wash-tub before eats it's every man's business. I like spirit; but don't overdo it, little one. Maybe if you could fall for the fairy godmother make-believe you and me could get together and loosen Olsen's clutch-hold on you."

"You can't neither. He's got awful big pull. He could serve a soldier with liquor and they wouldn't touch him."

"So—but how comes the son-of-a—beg pardon, but how comes he your guardian?"

"I ran away dressed like a boy. It was the only way. They're awful mean to girls that's just bumming 'round."

"I see; you got into overalls, which it is felonious for a girl to wear male togs in this State. You was going to see the world, and lits over the county-line and strikes the first place handy for a job. I see the layout. You chops kindling and cleans around a while; then Adolf tumbles to your secret and hauls you before the judge he votes for."

"Yes. And the probation officer investigated uncle's and said it was no proper home for me and they——"

"So—" softly. "I'm wise. They make

Adolf your legal guardian and tosses him a cook, wash-girl, bed-maker, waitress, seamstress, etcetera—not counting the draw a likely girl is to a road-house—for her board and keeps, and hold over you the correction school for bad girls if you run away. You sure got a hard-luck spiel, Miss—I ain't got the other half of your name?"

"Jones."

"Miss Jones. You're sure up agin it. But it ain't no good tearing up like you was. You was only hurting yourself. Go easy. Leave it to fairy godmother. Come; let's shake on it."

She let him take her hand, her face brightening like a hurt child who has been comforted. He held the soft, little white hand in his big brown fist as if it were a fragile cream puff.

"Mum's the word, Miss Alice," he cautioned, then swung over to the bar.

"Howdy, Adolf. Howdy," to the parking gentry around. "Here I am for that revenge I promised myself, Adolf. You got me last time, but——"

"Nothing doing," said Adolf with finality, and grinned.

"Why—what do you mean? You mean to say you ain't going to give me a chance to even up?" incredulously.

"I'd be a nice easy sucker, wouldn't I, to go up against your coin now you've got the line of my play?" scoffed Adolf.

Bill regarded him much the same as if he had taken a sharp turn on the mountain trail and come face to face with an elephant.

"You're joshing—sure," he presently remarked.

"Gotta 'tend bar," Adolf sheepishly excused.

"Give me something to wash the taste o' that outen my mouth," Bill demanded. "Gimme lager."

He gargled his mouth ostentatiously and banged the glass on the bar.

"So—" he purred, getting a great deal of real meaning into his favorite monosyllable. "You think you're going to get by with it, Olsen. Take if from me—take it from Bill Watkins; I'm going to get it back on you; I'm going to get it back on you good and plenty."

"I ain't worrying none," said Adolf easily, displaying his crowded gravestones.

"No; you ain't the sense to worry. Grin, you lug-eared coyote—grin! But I'm giving you fair-to-warmer warning I'll even up with you."

He went to the stables, got the sorrel, mounted and rode off.

Next Saturday he was back again. Apparently he had forgotten the matter. Adolf thought so. Adolf received too many such idle threats that came to nothing to give it much thought.

"You're a good sport, Bill Watkins," he complimented.

"Oh, I don't cry over my medicine," said Bill easily.

Adolf grinned.

BILL spent freely during his visit and between whiles maneuvered himself into the company of Miss Jones. The next two week-ends passed much the same. He was laying for Adolf, and with the girl to make the visits attractive he was willing to lay a year or more, but Adolf was warming to his free money quicker than that. Sooner or later he would be asking Bill's advice on something or the other. Something would crop up. It was not so fast with the girl.

On the face of it she ought to have been easily attached to a hundred and fifty per but was as hard winning as if she were a daughter of the Knickerbocks with the pick of the land. Still she was not altogether discouraging. For one thing she exhibited an interest in Bill's welfare.

"What for do you want to let him get your money so free over the bar? He only thinks you're easy."

"And you don't like such false notions about me to circulate," he teased. "Kind o' humiliating, ain't it. Sure, he calls me sucker. That's all right. I've got to have some excuse for coming around. I ain't yet ready to let him know I'm out to steal his ward. When are you going to let me hitch you to a meal-ticket, Allie?"

"I haven't given it a thought," she flashed.

That night when he was about to saddle, Olsen came 'round to the stables.

"Bill," he said, "if you hear of any one wanting to buy a car I can throw a little commission your way."

"That's real kind. The chances are I will and the chances are equal I won't. Le's have a look at her."

Adolf led away to a shack garage and exhibited his wonder.

"I bought her to run a stage-line through to Half Moon Bay, but there wasn't enough business. I got her on a bargain at eleven hundred."

"You're imagining vain things. If you gave a cent more than eight hundred for her you'd have a lunacy commission sitting on you. What'll you take?"

"Seven hundred."

"I didn't ask you what you want but what you'll take."

"The tires are almost new and there ain't a scratch on her," pursued Adolf.

"When I'm buying a hoss I don' buy hide and shoes," drawled Bill, taking a look at the engine. He investigated thoroughly. Adolf forestalled the result.

"Tell you what, Bill. You find me a sucker at five hundred and I'll slip a hundred to you."

Bill helped himself to a toothpick, an innocent action, but one provocative of profound thought.

"Well, maybe I hear of a buyer and maybe I don't. Let's have that down in writing."

"Between friends—" began Adolf, but shut up at the look in Bill's eyes. "All right."

Bill chased a paper bag trundling before a freaky slap of wind, flattened it out and wrote the agreement, which both signed. Bill called Alice to witness the signatures.

"Put your name right there under mine, Miss Jones."

When Bill found himself on the mountain road he chuckled. He had had a prospective buyer in mind the minute Adolf mooted the sale of the car. As he neared the mill he dropped off to the left and rode down to the village of Boulder Creek, which lay in perpetual mountain shadow amidst a paradise of trickling streams and miniature waterfalls and whose inhabitants put an interpretation on the word "business" that would make Machiavelli look like a Sunday-school teacher. He rode to a general merchandise store owned by Olaf Wassel, ostensibly to lay in a stock of smokes and compliment him on the quality of the last lot of beans supplied to the mill boarding-house. This, however, was merely introductory.

"Didn't you tell me you were selling out and going to the old country?"

"Sure. I got a feller from San Francisco coming down to look over next week."

"So—you wanta buy a car?"

"T' —— I do."

"Yes you do," insinuated Bill. "It'll make the business look that much more prosperous. Every successful business man owns a car nowadays. Anyways you don't stand to lose a cent on this deal. I'll take the car off your hands and leave you a hundred plunks to the good."

"My two ears are wide open," Wassel invited suspiciously.

Bill took the right one and outlined the "deal." Olaf listened with pop-eyed delight. Still, he had his doubts.

"S'posing you refuse to take the car off my hands?"

"S'pose I don't know my way about and done with it," scoffed Bill. "Isn't the car my rake-off. But whichever way it goes you stand to win a hundred plunks and risk nothing."

"All right," agreed Olaf. "I'll drop over and see my countryman."

"Oh sure," purred Bill, as if the point were new to him. "He is a countryman of yours—o' course."

His next move was to call on "Judge" Oppenheim. This was after the Monday evening whistle blew. Oppenheim's manifold activities were set forth in enamelled lettering on the front window—insurance, wills, bequests, collections, attainders, mortgages, loans. Therefore it was perfectly superfluous of Bill to ask him if he were open to make a bit of side-money.

"Far be money from my aching thoughts," smirked Oppenheim.

"Then give ear to this layout of mine and wise me if it's a legal cinch," said Bill, and laid out the lines of his pleasing plot.

Oppenheim heard him to the end. His moon-face, flat and empty as a clean dinner-plate, suffused his best approach to a grin.

"There isn't a judge would hesitate five minutes in finding in your favor. It's hidebound. He'll bring suit, of course. You retain me, I take it."

"You take it right, Oppy. S' long."

* * *

THREE evenings later Bill's soul was delighted to see a nicely polished car with almost new tires standing before the store. He thought Wassel might have let him know that the deal was gone through. He reserved a thought about it as he entered the store.

"How's she coming, Olaf?"

"Fine and dandy. That 'Frisco feller'll be down to take stock Sunday and Monday. I'll keep the car around till I've turned over."

"Attaboy," agreed Bill, and Wassell was beautifully deceived. "When you leaving?"

"Thursday, I guess. I'll hand the car over to you Wednesday night and take your hundred dollars, eh?"

Bill nodded, but outside indulged in a short soliloquy.

"Yes, you will, you will, but you don't think you will."

Saturday he climbed the serpentine mountain road again to the road-house. Adolf's welcoming grin was a yard wide.

"I put the deal through with the feller you sent over. I'll owe you a hundred plunks."

"What's the matter with not getting out of debt right now?"

"I ain't collected yet. Party's a little shy on ready money; gave me two notes for two-fifty each, due at seven and fourteen days."

"Good biz," purred Bill. "A'right; I guess I can wait for mine. Have a smile—everybody."

He nodded toward the brass-rail foot-polishers, flung down a coin, grabbed his drink and slipped out 'round to the kitchen door and imitated the liquid call of the meadow lark to its soulmate. By fortunate coincidence Alice had occasion right thereafter to empty a dish-pan in the yard. Bill's eyes twinkled, but he was too wise to ask if anything was the matter with the sink.

"Allie, I'm coming over in my car next week to take you out. You'll want some fixings, little one, unless you're not agin marrying in a gunnysack petticoat."

"I haven't any idea of marrying in mind," short and quick.

"Life," philosophized Bill, "is like a mountain road; we never know what we're meeting 'round the bend."

His eyes wolfed her and he seemed hard put to it to control his empty arms.

She backed away a little, whispering objection.

"He won't never let me—go out riding; he's my legal guardian."

"Leave it to your fairy godmother's magic wand to dissipate those objections," crowed Bill, and took a step toward her. "Allie," he began on a softer note, "Allie ——"

"Bill," she interjected with scary quickness, "I got to get supper."

She flashed to the kitchen.

Events crowded Bill's existence next week. Tuesday night he dropped into the store at Boulder Creek, "T' see how the 'Frisco buyer was making out," he put it. Wassel was packing his grips, also he was shaved. When a man shaves on a midweek night he's off to the city in the morning or he's sitting on a coroner's jury, was Bill's observation. But he kept it to himself.

"See you tomorrow night, Olaf," he said, significantly of the bargain to hand over the car then, and swung out, glanced cautiously around, then slipped to the shed that served for garage, glided in and opened the valves of all four tires.

"That'll keep him busy, if mayhap I don't hear the alarum go off in the morning," he told himself. "It's a cinch he won't try out that wriggly mountain road at nighttime with a car he ain't familiar with."

But he did hear the alarum, and was up, saddled and riding down to the store as dawn struck the mountain skyline. Even at that Wassel was earlier. The machine stood before the store on four hard tires, with Wassel's grips on the rear seat and Wassel himself about to flit. Bill's eyes twinkled.

"Was you borrowing my car for a trip to city, Olaf? That's a'right, if only you'd mentioned it beforehand."

"Your car," blustered Wassel. "Since when? I got a perfectly good bill of sale on that car."

"So—" in that soft, caressing tone that conveyed gentle remonstrance, persuasion, lurking warning, invitation to sit down hip-to-hip and talk reasonably. "I've brought my hundred dollars, 'cording to agreement, and I take back the car, or sick Olsen on to you for security for those notes before you lit out. Just tumble them grips out, Wassel, and don't try to pull any fool stuff."

Wassel grimaced, but saw that Bill had the drop on him. They went into the house and fixed up a bill of sale, which Bill stowed in his vest pocket with Adolf's bill of sale to Wassel, then hitched the sorrel to the car, cranked and drove off, the sorrel waltzing on its hind legs. Passing the superintendent's bungalow he saw Goodyear handing his wife into their car for an early run up to city. He stopped to Goodyear's hail.

"What's the layout, Bill—training the sorrel for circus?"

"Nope. I'm bribing a girl to give me a little of her company off and on between the lure of city frivolities," returned Bill, digging at the notorious fact that Goodyear only held wife and job together by the bribe of an eight cylinder that brought the city within a few hours' run.

He addressed the pampered doll in the car.

"Would it be trespassing on your kindness, Mrs. Goodyear, to do a little buying for me in the city?"

"Delighted. What brand do you chew?"

Bill ignored the idleness; he was too dead in earnest.

"I'd like for you to get a nice warm fur coat like you're wearing, and a hat to go along with it and something smart in the way of petticoats."

"Who is she, Bill?" was the instant feminine cry.

Goodyear echoed the question.

"Where d'ye find her, Bill?"

"That's neither here nor there."

"Well—what is she like?" persisted Mrs. Goodyear. "Give me a line to go on in my buying."

"I hate to crow one woman over another," Bill answered, with simple sincerity.

Mrs. Goodyear laughed.

"But I must know what she is like. You'll—she'll want a bit of color in the hat. Is she dark or fair, tall or short, stout or slender, eyes black, brown or blue?"

Bill drew a toothpick from his ear, started to put it between his teeth, remembered he was talking to a lady, tossed it away, frowned and lined up all his gray matter on the job.

"She's kind o' dainty, not quite your size —pretty; her eyes are——"

"Stars out of the sky," bubbled Mrs. Goodyear. "Her feet are posies; she has the grace of a fawn and her smile is like moonlight on an azure lake. Oh, Bill, you've taken it bad. Come down to earth, crazy man, and give me facts. How much shall I spend—how far shall I go."

"Go the limit," he roared, but qualified it down to two to three hundred.

Mrs. Goodyear laughed a little enviously. "Very good. But I simply must know what she is like—what would suit her?"

"I ain't no hand describing wimmin," Bill confessed. But out of despair came inspiration. "What's the matter with you stopping at the road-house just over the county-line and seeing her yourself. Peek into the kitchen."

"Oh, Bill, you aren't taking to wife a girl working at a road-house?" she shrilly protested. "You could do ever so much better than—" She pulled up on a danger-signal in his eyes. "All right. Shall it be C. O. D. or shall I start a charge account?"

"Better open an account. She'll be wanting to send up once in a while for something."

He wiped his brow over the ordeal as she shot off. He met Goodyear's grin belligerently. But the superintendent was out to grease the matrimonial wheels.

"You can have the bungalow next the accountant's, Bill," anxiously, "I'm trusting to your good judgment to select a lady. We're a small society here and the wrong kind can make a heap of trouble."

"Don't worry, Jim. Lots of good rock lies in unlikely places."

"You'd better spare a couple of men from your gang to fix the bungalow up a bit. You can draw on the storekeeper for necessaries—Bill. Don't bust us."

Bill went off with a satisfactory feeling that the worst part of the business of getting married was over.

He settled into the routine, joyously anticipating Friday, when Olsen would hop along to collect on the first note. He expected Adolf to suffer a disappointment. He expected him to bring his disappointment to the quarry. He expected Adolf to be raging, and chewed a peck of toothpicks in blissful satisfaction.

FRIDAY forenoon passed without excitement. In the afternoon they were blasting. Through a suspended cloud of fine dust squat, swarthy Mexicans and Italians showed against the cement rock like roaches on a kitchen wall, humped on narrow ledges, shaking to the tremendous vibrations of gattling electric drills that shrilled and screamed like a battle. Then drills and feeding wires were drawn away to safety. Power charges were tamped home, whilst Bill ran connecting wires for the electric spark.

Bill always saw to this work personally. He took no chances on misfires and the risk of collecting men in instalments and depriving a mother back in sunny Italy of her monthly p. o. It was very particular work, so he was somewhat nettled that Adolf should choose that moment to intrude two hundred and thirty pounds of volcanic rage into the scenery. Yes, Adolf had mislaid his heathenish grin down in an interview with the new owner of the store below.

"That feller Wassel has lit out!" he shrieked, waving a piece of paper with a face-value of two hundred and fifty dollars but which wouldn't have lost him a cent if he had put a match to it.

Bill finished his work.

"Stand back everybody!" he roared.

Squat men-shapes dropped from the cliff's face and ran doubled with arms shielding heads and ear-drums to safety. He ran to the controlling switch, blundering Adolf and his bit of paper out of his path.

"Stand clear, you fool," he hissed, "or you'll never wake up to know what happened to you."

A couple of gesticulating Italians tried to convey the same warning.

"Hit him with a rock!" yelled Bill, waiting to throw the switch.

One of the fellows took the order literally. Adolf ran. Bill swung the tiny switch. A terrific explosion tore off the face of the cliff. Before the echoes had died out of the reverberating mountains the laborers were swinging picks to clear the runway for the dump cars.

Bill slipped a toothpick between his lips and turned to Adolf.

"Did you wish to see me about something, Adolf?"

"That feller Wassel has lit out for the old country," screamed the frantic Swede.

"So—but why the excitement? He don't owe me anything."

"He's a crook! You knew he was a crook!"

"Well," drawled Bill, "I can't say I'm surprised. But you ain't so strong on Sunday-school sentiments yourself. What's your kick?"

"He's done me up! I'm stuck with five hundred dollars on bad notes!"

"You don't say. I take it you took his notes unsecured. That was mighty careless of you, Adolf. You disappoint me grievously. I thought you was a real on-the-dot business man. You sure gave me the notion in a little poker sitting that you was right there with the goods. Too bad," chirped Bill with not so much sympathy in tone as the words might imply.

He drew off and gave Adolf a profound quizz, as if there was something unfamiliar about him.

"You seem changed, Adolf. I can't quite—yes, I got it; you've lost your grin. Too bad. You wasn't half so homely with it as you are without it."

"You fixed this up with him!" bellowed Olsen. "You're both crooks!"

"So—easy, Adolf, easy. Not so loud around here. I'm ticklish about my repitation. If you took unsecured notes that was plumb foolish, I'm real sorry I wasn't there at the dicker to teach you the simple rudiments o' business. Lemme see how we stand. I got to collect a hundred commission, ain't it?"

Adolf fell back on his mother tongue for curses sufficiently explosive and deep to ventilate his rage.

"You don't get a cent! You've got my car. I'll go get it."

"Well, you're steering your own ship, o' course. But don't bite off more'n you kin chew. Seems to me I got your bill-of-sale to Olaf and one from him to me and that notion of yours looks very ugly like grand larceny."

"I'll file an attachment on the car! I'll attach your salary! I'll have the law on you, you crook!" yelled Adolf.

"So—" softly. "Don't get et up about it. I'll drop over in my car tomorrow night and see how you make out. Like to look over the mill whilst you're here? It's interesting to see the machinery grind and burn the rock and bag it. We've got a patent bagger that cost an inventive genius a whole lot of hard thinking. I'll show you around. What—you gotta go? S'long then."

His eyes twinkled happily to see Adolf stumble away in blind rage, his great feet stubbing strewn boulders, like a great, hulking Viking reeling from lost battle, stopping every now and then to turn and shake a huge fist and imprecate in his mother tongue.

When whistle blew Bill dropped down to the sheriff's cottage.

"Howdy, Jim What's in it for you to serve an attachment?"

"Three-fifty."

"So—that's disappointing; I sure thought I was throwing more than that your way; you'll be pasting an attachment on my car and putting one on my salary. A measly seven dollars."

"Unless the case is hung up, when there's a new attachment on your salary each month."

Bill slapped his knee with joyous inspiration. He was on the monthly payroll, with other department heads, notwithstanding his weekly visits to Adolph, which he financed in a frenzied way by advance drawings on his salary or borrowings—that is, when the poker game hit him hard in the first Saturday of the month. He told the sheriff he would get the cashier at the mills to shift him temporarily to the weekly payroll of the laborers, which would put Adolph to the necessity of making a fresh attachment every week, to the financial betterment of the sheriff. Then he went on to "Judge" Oppenheim's.

"Oppy, that feller has bitten, and bitten hard."

"He's suing?"

"Betcher he's suing."

"When do you want the case set?"

"No hurry. We're pretty busy up at the mills on a Government contract. Also there's a bit girl involved as ain't yet on to her own mind. Say a couple o' months."

"I'll see to it. But he'll tie up your wages."

"Sure; he promised that. Suits me; make me save up something to git spliced on. By the way, you will counter-sue for a hundred dollars commission, and whilst you're on the job shoot through a damage claim for my pecuniary loss consequent on him tying up my salary and injury to my repitation. I understand loser pays attorneys' fees, witnesses, mileage and sundry expenses?"

"It is customary, if the winner's case is strong, and I'll wager the judge'll reach a verdict favorable to you on all counts without leaving the bench."

"You know the law of it, Oppy. Tune her up. Figure strong on the injury to my repitation and the nervous torture I'm going through," blandly. "I'm losing weight dreadful, Oppy. The doctor is piling up a bill agin me. I can't sleep. I'm that nervous I can't touch giant powder. I'm likely to lose my job. I'm hit hard, Oppy, in my tenderest feelings—in my repitation. He called me a crook, Oppy, right out before the boys. I could ha' dropped in my tracks fer shame. He's dragging me into court. I'm all broken up and——"

"Get out of here, you roaring mountain lion," laughed Oppenheim.

Next morning Bill put an Italian to polishing the car for the evening trip, but stacked up against a disappointment. Goodyear said he was called up to the city office. Bill more than suspected that a yearning for Mrs. Goodyear was behind the call, for the lady had not yet returned. Still he could not kick, particularly as he had a hunch he might want the superintendent to spell him for a couple of days in the near future, if his intentions got by with Alice.

MONDAY morning the sheriff served the attachments. Bill was as gay over it as if he had received a present. The same evening Goodyear and his wife drove in. She brought a fur coat, a hat-box and half a dozen petticoats, and a charge slip that would have flattened out any one but Bill or a millionaire with a loveless home treating his stenog. But he thought of Saturday and grinned. Fate, however, in the shape of Adolf's attorney moved the presentation two days nearer.

Thrifty Adolf had seen to the simple business of filing the attachments without incurring attorney's expenses, confident that he was merely calling Bill's bluff. It was not till he was served with summonses on the counter-suits that he woke up to where he stood and took a scary flight into San Mateo to consult an attorney, who took something less than ten minutes to discover that his client was in bad all 'round.

"You took the notes in payment on the car and gave bill of sale. The responsibility was on you to see that the notes were secured. You haven't a leg to stand on. Watkins's commission stands good, and his damage claim against you looks to dig a big hole in your bank account. Your best way out of a bad mess is to let me see his attorney and try for a compromise."

"But they worked a crooked game on me," whined Adolf.

"That is presumptive, but hard to prove. I wouldn't be too noisy about that, if I were you."

"Is that the law?" Adolf demanded

fiercely, as if law had suddenly assumed cloven hoofs and horns.

"Certainly."

Adolf howled. He ripped America and American jurisprudence up and down like a true hyphenate, until the attorney quietly stopped him.

"Don't abuse the hospitality of the country that is giving you home and livelihood. As for your case, I would jeopardize my standing by taking it into court, which, by the way, would be in Santa Cruz, and I must remind you that your pull stops at the county-line. I'll try and effect a compromise in a friendly way, though it looks to me as if this Watkins had it in for you."

"Why should he? I ain't never done him dirt," declared Adolf with simple belief.

"Well, a man in his position would be on the staff payroll at the mills, yet he's drawing weekly salary with the laborers, to put you to the expense of a weekly attachment, I deduce."

"The low-down skunk!"

"Possibly. But calling names isn't helping you. Are you for a compromise?"

"I gotta be, ain't I?" snapped Adolf. "You bring him over to the road-house and I'll spill a little licker to mellow the talk," he nicely arranged.

Accordingly Bill was called from the "beanery" Thursday noon to the phone. Oppenheim was on the line. He had had a confab over the wires with Adolf's attorney, who invited all parties to the road-house that night for an amicable settlement.

"Well," said Bill, "I'd as lief take it to court, only the Swede has one draw on me he ain't yet wise to. He might lug out his legal guardianship to a bit girl and spring a straight-flush on me. I'll pick you up in the car about 4 o'clock."

He went to Goodyear.

"Jim, I got a little law business to see to this evening, and maybe after I'll want to slip up to city for a few days."

"And you're not going lonesome. All right, Bill; Saunders can fill your shoes, though he'll sky-high our workmen's insurance premiums. Good luck."

A little after four he swung out on the tortuous mountain road, in a sixty-dollar suit that had seen daylight but twice in a year's possession, his chin as smooth as the mill barber could make it, hair cut and laid away on each side from a center line with weighting bay rum, his face ferocious with determination to bring to a show-down the worst tangle in his career, a tangle that had but minor connection with the compromise.

"Gals is funny things," he confided to Oppenheim.

"Bill, I'd take it with real relief if you could budge your mind off girls and put it in that steering-gear this trip," opined the attorney as they swung 'round a sharp bend and hung a wheel a thrilling moment over a sheer drop of a thousand feet.

"Keep your eye on those bundles on the back seat. Better take the hat-box on your knees," was all the satisfaction he got.

He shot 'round the road-house to the yard. The San Mateo attorney's rig was there.

"You go in, Oppy, and stall along for a few moments," said Bill, grabbing the bundles and making stealthy steps to the kitchen.

The ward of the State was up to her ears in pots and pans, so busy she did not hear the screen door at her back. Bill stood rooted on the temptation of four inches of pretty neck showing under a close-cropped head and down to a gingham. Before he had found his courage she had found him.

"Hullo, Allie," he grinned. "Think I was gone back on you 'cause I wasn't around last Saturday?"

"I didn't think anything about it," she pouted, a little too readily to carry conviction.

"Didn't cry—not a teeny bit?" teased Bill.

"Cry because there was one big mouth less to peel 'taters for!"

"Well, I ain't here to make you blush confessions," he brazened, dumping his arm-load on a chair. "Your fairy godmother's sent you some glad duds, and there's a buzz wagon outside that'll put it all over the coach-and-six stuff. You and me are headed for one big streak of joy-ride."

"Speak for yourself," she flashed, holding a sloppy dish-rag for self-defense, so hungry were his eyes. Then, in a quick change of mood—"He won't let me go."

"Leave me to take care of that end. Here——"

He advanced and pried the dish-rag from her fingers and drew her two arms out straight and loaded on the bundles, topping them with the hat-box.

"You go up-stairs and get into those duds, then take the front seat in our car and leave it all up to godmother's magic wand."

But she was still fighting.

"Our car. I haven't any strings on your car, Bill Watkins."

"Allie," said Bill with cool insolence, "if you stand there back-sassing and looking so pretty I'll just grab you to the car as you are and joy-ride in gingham."

She flashed him a look, decided he was capable of carrying out the threat and fled.

BILL walked 'round to the bar. He found the two attorneys skirmishing the preliminaries and big Adolf trying to look happy.

"Glad to see you, Bill," Adolf tooted blandly.

"You're a durned liar. You'd as lief see Old Harry."

Adolf had to swallow that.

"Have a smile."

"I'm here strictly on business."

"Y-e-s," Adolf pushed hesitatingly off his thick lips. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Me? I ain't doing nothing. I'm laying back on my winnings, which I figure around a mighty good second-hand car, a hundred plunks commission and what we agree on to balm my injured repitation, and expenses, o' course."

Adolf tried to grin, but succeeded only in manufacturing an expression about twice as sad as a deserted seashore at murmuring low tide with the sun sinking over the rim of a sad world and a chilly breeze stealing in. When he spoke his words seemed cloyed with an acre of entangling kelp, notwithstanding their effrontery.

"I'm willing to drop suit and to allow you the hundred commission for the return of my car."

"Your car. Where d'ye get that stuff? Wake up, Adolph."

The latter's attorney got in hurriedly on the soft pedal.

"My client, Mr. Watkins, recognizes that he was overhasty and ill-advised."

"Yep, Bill," Adolf chirped in. "You got to allow you wasn't doing no friendly——"

"Friendly!" blazed Bill. "It was business. Ugh!" His hand sought his right ear for a toothpick, then he remembered the barbering. "Friendly! If the shoe was on the other foot you'd be about as friendly as a ravenous coyote with a rabbit."

Adolf muttered something about a square deal, and put his foot right into it.

"You gave Miss Jones a square deal, eh—you gorilla-faced piker? Have you brought me over from the mountains to spill baby talk? Wake up to the game you're sitting in on. The stakes are on the table. The car and my commission ain't in it at all. I'm betting withdrawal of my suit for damages to repitation and pecuniary loss against your legal consent to the marriage of Miss Alice Jones."

Adolf howled, blustered, plead; threatened all the inhumane authority of the humane and probation laws, bellowed, cursed.

Bill raised up on his toes and squinted over the swinging doors to the bar. A saucy toque with a lilac cluster first met his gaze, then a pretty ear, the collar of a fur coat and the barest tip of a pretty nose.

"Some rustler, eh?" he enthused. "Real quick-change artist you lose there, Adolf. Ain't she the lady though."

Adolf renewed his howls and bellows and bluster.

"Well," said Bill, "if you're going to take it like that there's nothing for me but to steal the jack-pot." He turned to Oppenheim. "Oppy, I'll leave you to get sense into his fool head, and to get him to drive you back to Boulder."

"Oh, he'll see daylight when he cools off," the attorney prophesied. "Perhaps when I get him to see the unpleasant position of his friend the probation officer, in probating a girl to a road-house he'll see he hasn't much of a squeal. Good luck, Bill."

"Attaboy!"

Bill swung out, cranked, thought to himself it wouldn't be long before he had an electric starter, sprang to the wheel and shot away in a swirl of dust.

"There ain't no ball nor glass slippers nor handsome prince to this trip, Cinderella," he crooned softly to the little fur-cuddled, silent figure by his side. "But I'll show you a bigger chunk of the world than you yet saw, and maybe we'll take in a show or two and kind o' general— Aw', Allie, girl, say something. I ain't rushing you into this."

The reply came in a half-whisper but spirited.

"You couldn't rush me into anything if I wasn't willing, Bill."

EMERALDS AND BLONDIE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by

Gladys E. Johnson

IN THE bright lexicon of Tom Fleming there was no such word as moderation. It simply didn't exist.

Tom dwelt in a superlative world where every child with a stomach-ache was a case of arsenic poisoning; every poor shaver who nicked himself during the daily massacre, an attempted Black Hand outrage. The beggar who panhandled him on the street was a foreign spy; the ol'-clo's man who bought his worn-out suits was a Russian duke in exile. In other words, Tom was the horrible by-product of the movies.

The red-letter day of Tom's life had been the time he met Mullaney. Mullaney was an honest-to-goodness detective—Tom would have spelt that word in capital letters. This occasion had come about when Mullaney had dropped into the real-estate office where Tom was employed as salesman. Mullaney was on the trail of a gentleman who had been over-lavish with other people's signatures.

After the business in hand had been disposed of, Tom ventured the question which had been hovering on his tongue for minutes.

"Have a drink?"

Mullaney would, it seemed, and over a gin fizz was confided the young man's secret ambition.

Mullaney bore up under the news well. He was stoical—pessimistic even. Examining the three-star brand in his hand with the squinted eye of a connoisseur he gave vent to the opinion that sleuthing wasn't what it was cracked up to be. In fact he spoke slightingly of the profession, the very name of which fired Tom's imagination to the explosive point. But the young fellow was not dashed. This was his chance and he was going to grasp it.

"Honestly, I'd give most anything to get in it," he said earnestly. "Say, any time you have anything sort of extra—where you can use another man—an outsider, you know, tip me off. I'd be tickled to death to do anything. I—I'll stop at no danger," he added a little ashamed of the dramatic phrasing even as it came out.

Mullaney said he'd remember it and didn't Tom think that they served extra-small glasses in that place?

The funny part of it is that he did remember it. Tom's mental horizon was suddenly flooded with the purple and gold of romance when he met the detective one night upon leaving the office. The sleuth delivered his proposition in a bored manner which in no wise dampened the young man's ardor.

"Say, if you were on the level about wanting to bust into the game as an extra here's something, and remember, you ain't offending me none if you turn it down. Read about this Gaddis-Neville wedding that's coming off this evening up here at the St. Stephen Hotel? Well, there's going to be a bunch of people there and they want some men to watch the wedding presents. They left it to me to round them up and I thought of you. There's five bones in it for you if you want to take a chance."

If he wanted to! Tom's heart action increased alarmingly. Five dollars would only pay for his laundry, to be sure—but the color, the chance for adventure—to be a real live detective for a night! The phlegmatic Mr. Mullaney narrowly escaped being hugged.

"Got a dress-suit?" was the first fly in the ointment.

Tom's face dropped a couple of feet.

"Oh, gee, no—but say, I can hire one!"

"That'll do," agreed Mullaney sadly. "We're to mosey around in the crush and sorta keep an eye on things. There ain't really much sense to it. Nothing'll happen; nothing ever does. Nobody with brains would lift the stuff they give at these weddings, it's tinfoil mostly, but if they're willing to pay, I ain't hired to teach 'em. You hire one of those 'curse you' suits and show up at the St. Stephen at 8:30. There's four of us—you'll find me in the hall where the wedding is going to be pulled off."

Tom was walking on air when he and the hired dress-suit reached the bay-windowed, dingy gray house out on O'Farrell Street which in sentimental moments he called home. San Francisco is full of such houses, left standing since "before the fire"; all of the vintage of the '80s, all relics of broken-down-aristocracy fallen upon evil days. Tom occupied what he flippantly referred to as "Cell Number One"; the one-time front parlor and kitchenette tucked into a former clothes-closet, and officially known as the first suite of housekeeping rooms.

He ran up the high wooden steps and was reaching for his latch-key when the door was flung open and some one rushing impetuously out collided against him with such neatness and dispatch that the hired dress-suit went flying down the steps behind him.

"*Ugh!*" he exclaimed and was about to add that classic advice about watching your step when he recognized his collidee so to speak. She was the pretty blonde who had the rear room on the second floor.

The girl had been flung back against the ugly wooden banister of the hall stairs, her hat knocked over her straight little nose and a long silky strand of hair jolted loose from under its brim.

At any other time Tom would have welcomed the episode. He had wanted—unsuccessfully—to meet Helen Mercer ever since he had seen her moving into the house two weeks ago. Even now he forgot his rôle of the cool, keen-eyed sleuth, long enough to crush the rescued dress-suit under his arm and say, with embarrassed sincerity:

"Oh, I say, Miss Mercer, I'm awfully sorry. I haven't hurt you, have I?"

The girl tilted the broad-rimmed hat back from her nose and caught her breath with a little gasp. Even before she spoke, Tom's eyes flooded with wonder. The girl was not only startled, as would be natural under the circumstances, she was fearful; her gray eyes looking out from a face gone white with fright.

Instinctively following her gaze, Tom saw the reason. Her heavy gray overcoat had been hastily pulled on and left unbuttoned. Their late encounter had flung it open to reveal a radiant vision of a golden dress, its top flounce looped with row upon row of expensive pearls. It was an evening dress—and a dress incongruous with the modest hat and the inexpensive gray coat.

This much he saw and the girl spasmodically jerked the coat closed and covered the telltale golden mass. Her laugh was strained and the color still absent from the smooth cheeks.

"No, oh, no; I'm not hurt a bit. It—it was stupid of me but I was in a hurry and I didn't look before I opened the door."

She gave him a smile, still tremulous and fled precipitously down the outer steps, leaving a very much perturbed and puzzled young man looking after her.

Tom unlocked the door of his own chilly

domain, the neglected dress-suit still crushed under one arm. His keen young eyes had narrowed reflectively. That astute sense of the fitness of things was whispering suspiciously to him again. Here was an incongruity which he could not account for.

It occupied his mind while he dressed. What was the answer anyway, he asked his reflection as he put on his collar before the mirror. Why should the girl be so startled because her coat had flown open. Suppose he had seen her evening dress. Lots of girls who worked wore them. Still there was something funny about it. That dress was no eighteen-fifty bargain prize; even to his inexperienced eyes.

Why, the pearls alone must have cost her a couple of hundred dollars if they went all around the flounce in the same lavish fashion with which they decorated the front. If she could afford a dress like that, why didn't she have a hat and coat to match; and—even more logical—why did she live in housekeeping rooms in this dingy O'Farrell Street house?

A glance at the alarm clock, balanced perilously on the edge of the bureau, postponed the solution of this problem until a more convenient time. It was fifteen minutes after eight; Mullaney had said to be there at 8:30. Pretty Helen Mercer and her mysterious golden dress were relegated to the background of Tom's mind and Detective Fleming fairly leaped into his overcoat and ran down the steps.

II

BY 11:30 Tom was willing to admit that the pessimistic Mullaney was right when he ventured the prediction that "nothing'll happen." Notwithstanding the fact that he obediently mingled with the guests and kept a conscientious eye on the tableful of wedding presents, he knew in his heart that no light-fingered gentry, who was not light-headed at the same time, would attempt to get away with the massive but comparatively inexpensive silver which formed the bulk of the gifts.

For the first couple of hours, the thought of being there at all; at recognizing celebrities who had been mere newspaper names to him heretofore; the kaleidoscopic color, the tintinnabulating music, the heated, perfumed air had all served to keep his imagination up to the romantic pitch.

Then it began to cloy. His adventurous spirits flagged in proportion as his feet began to hurt. The rooms seemed stuffy, the crowd and babble about him seemed purposeless; he didn't blame Mullaney for not being more enthusiastic about his job if this was all that detecting amounted to. Gosh, if something would only happen, if some one would only attempt to stagger out under the cumbersome cut-glass punch-bowl; if the orchestra leader would only choke the host. Even the wedding left his imagination cold.

The bride looked nervous and stringy, Tom decided, with the sweeping bluntness of youth that the groom was a "big boob." He started to yawn as he walked for the forty-eighth time about the room, when some instinct within him caused him to bite the yawn in the middle and straighten up, much as a terrier pricks up his ears at the first whiff of trouble.

In the further corner by the orchestra, an agitated little knot of people had clustered and even through the barbaric beat of the music a woman's voice, hysterically raised, caused the dancers in her vicinity to turn curious heads. Then he saw her—an under-dressed stout woman, magnificently upholstered in mauve.

Tom was starting over with all of an Irishman's delight in a coming row, when he was checked by the sight of Mullaney worming his way through the crowd toward him. There was concern on Mullaney's face for the first time in the memory of man. He drew the young man aside behind a group of potted palms which concealed the entrance to a small marble anteroom.

"Listen, Fleming," the detective's voice was low but ominously grim, "there's a grand little party on and it's up to us to make good. Somebody's got away with a twenty-thousand-dollar emerald necklace. This Chetwynd dame——"

Tom interrupted, his hazel eyes snapping with excitement.

"The Chetwynd emeralds!"

He was making a desperate effort to appear blasé and accustomed to this sort of thing, but in spite of himself a tremulous delight sounded through his tone.

"Yep." Mullaney swept on. "Seems she had 'em up to a couple o' minutes ago; she remembers feeling the clasp to make sure they were all right. Next thing she knew, they were gone. Right under our noses, too. There's such a mob here, there's only one thing to do. Make every one give an account of themselves—make sure they got a right to be here, then search 'em. They'll crab their heads off too," he interjected grimly. "You watch this door—I got men watching every other one, and then we'll spring the surprise party on the crowd. If any one tries to beat it out of here, nab 'em; they'll be the one who did it."

He gave the young fellow a shove toward the door of the little anteroom and hurried back to the group across the room which had already swelled to twice its original size and was steadily drowning out the orchestra.

All suspicion of ennui was gone from Tom's manner now. He was as alert as a bloodhound on a criminal's trail. Something had happened at last. He was to be an actor in a real jewel robbery. What unbelievably good luck!

A searching glance around the anteroom proved it empty. The miniature forest of palms concealed it from the view of the main ballroom; it was a pretty little ambush, whose marble walls, draped in Chinese blue velvet hangings had listened to many intimate conversations. A wicker settee, carefully limited to two, was the only furniture. From this little retreat a side entrance led to the rear hall of the hotel and fixing this door with his eyes, Tom flung himself on the settee to follow orders.

The babble of the ballroom had grown to a hubbub which suddenly gave way to an ominous hush. Tom could hear the host's voice explaining the loss of the emeralds, interrupted hysterically by the excited owner of the necklace.

A guest's voice, no doubt assisted by the astute Mr. Mullaney rather pompously proposed that every one be searched in order to put their minds at rest, and offered himself as the first candidate.

Upon this the babble broke out anew again. Tom, his ears strained to miss no part of this drama into which he was so suddenly thrust, was wishing that he had been assigned a position more in the midst of things. He was even growing a trifle resentful at Mullaney for putting him in this neglected station when a stealthy footstep outside on the marble floor caused him to prick up his ears terrior-fashion once more, then slip noiselessly behind an outjutting angle of the wall.

A hand wormed whitely between the blue curtains hanging in the archway, they swayed apart ever so slightly and a figure slid into the room. For a moment Tom listened in silence to the frightened breathing of the intruder; then, before the curtain had stopped its slight swaying he stepped out to confront the fugitive.

The surprise was fifty-fifty. He found himself staring blankly back into the terrified gray eyes of Helen Mercer.

For a long moment the young man could do no more than fix his gaze speechlessly on the slim golden form outlined against the dull blue background of the curtain. The girl's face was chalky, so white that the gray eyes seemed almost black in contrast and the pupils spread nearly to the rim of the iris. One hand was convulsively pressed to her pounding heart crushing the pearls on the bodice regardlessly.

At the sight of the young man the muscles in her throat twitched spasmodically once, then she went so limp that he was afraid she was going to faint.

"Miss Mercer! What are you doing here?"

Tom tried to make his voice severe but the sight of that drooping figure appealed to him in spite of himself.

Strangely enough, after the first surprise the recognition of the young man seemed to brace the girl. A long, slow shudder shook her from head to foot, then she suddenly galvanized into life.

"Mr. Fleming! Oh, I'm so glad it's you. You'll help me, won't you? I've got to go—I've got to. They—they're searching them out there and they mustn't find me. You'll let me run, won't you, before they find me here? I'll explain to you tomorrow—but I've got to go now."

Even as she spoke she had run to the deep-silled window and pulling the velvet hanging impatiently aside had snatched up the familiar gray coat and the broad-rimmed hat Tom had seen her wear a few hours ago in such different surroundings.

"Wait a minute."

Tom's voice checked the girl as she frantically plunged her arms in the sleeves.

"Miss Mercer, you mustn't do that. Maybe you don't know what's the trouble, but Mrs. Chetwynd's emerald necklace is gone. I'm guarding this door to see that no one gets out. To see that the person who stole it has no chance to escape," he finished, his keen eyes narrowed on the girl's face.

"But I didn't take it! How could I—I don't even know what it looks like. I never saw Mrs. Chetwynd until tonight. Oh, Mr. Fleming, please, I can explain it all but I haven't time now and I'm afraid to stay. I'll meet you tomorrow, tonight—any time you say and tell you why but I've got to go now."

She had flown to him and was tugging at his arm, her face vivid with excitement, her breath coming fearfully through parted lips. In the soft radiance of the golden dress, with her hair in silky confusion about her upturned face she was as appealing as a child who has been caught in mischief and begs to be shielded. Tom's boyish heart almost groaned aloud.

"Miss Mercer, can't you see what you're making me think if you carry on this way? If you don't know anything about the necklace, why are you afraid of being searched?"

"Because I don't belong here—they don't know me—I wasn't invited," the girl was in a frenzy of impatience.

Tom continued, his soul torn in doubt.

"I wondered about you tonight, why you had a dress like this and still lived in that old house and how you were able to come to a place like this—but after all, that's your own affair—but this: trying to run away like this, can't you see I mustn't let you do that, no matter how sorry I am?"

"Oh, dear, I haven't time to stop to explain now. Mr. Fleming you must know that I didn't take it. You know I wouldn't steal anything, let alone a necklace they'd be sure to find if I did."

Tom was in an agony of uncertainty. It was hard to think consecutively with that pleading face raised to his; the eyes shining like twin gray stars in their anxiety. The girl's voice sank to a little choked whisper.

"You know I'm telling the truth. Please let me go before it's too late; I can explain everything but—oh, please——"

Her body froze in sudden terror at footfalls outside on the marble floor and Tom found himself forced to make a decision.

The young man's forehead was creased painfully.

"Oh, gee," he burst forth, "I hate to throw Mullaney down—but——"

A second step caused him to speak in a rapid tone.

"Miss Mercer, did any one see you come in here?"

"No, no, no."

New hope had come into the girl's eyes. She shook her head so positively that the pale golden mass on the top was threatened with downfall.

"All right," Tom exploded. "Hurry up, before any one sees you."

He saw the girl catch her breath in relief, her cold little hand suddenly gripped his and the next moment she had slipped out the hall door.

Tom walked back to the settee fighting an inward battle. Why did this have to happen? To catch the real thief; that would have been a glorious adventure; but to have to choose for no apparent reason between his word to Mullaney and the chance of getting Helen Mercer in trouble—it seemed so unnecessary.

Well, it wasn't such a dreadful deed after all, he told himself. The real thief would be discovered and he would have saved the girl from whatever indiscretion she was afraid might be revealed.

IT WAS nearly an hour later when Mullaney, looking a trifle worn and worried, entered the anteroom to find a glum young amateur detective awaiting him. Tom looked up eagerly.

"Well, who did it?"

Mullaney's tone was morose. No less morose were the faces of Pendleton Gaddis and the owner of the necklace close behind him.

"No luck," snapped the detective. "Whoever did it got away somehow. Darned if I know how, either; every one's accounted for and I've had men guarding every entrance. Whoever stole that necklace is the slickest proposition I ever heard of."

His words trickled like drops of cold water on Tom's conscience. Then she must have taken it; Helen Mercer with those wide gray eyes of hers; that appealing innocent face and those pleading little hands. The little cat—the little sneak—to deliberately play on his feelings. She must have had it all the time she was working him for an easy fool and behind those earnest eyes she was probably laughing at him. The thought was almost unbearable.

With one blow she had wounded the young man in his professional pride and in something deeper—something tenderly protective which had leaped to life for her that moment she had stood looking up at him so trustingly.

Mullaney's words broke in on the seething indignation within him. The detective's tone was weary. Tom felt a loyal pity for him; he knew what this would mean to him in a professional sense.

"You didn't see any one, did you, Fleming? No one tried to come through?"

Even as the young man opened his lips to reply he seemed to feel again that cold little hand slip over his. The pleading gray eyes floated between him and the strained faces before him.

"You know I wouldn't steal anything——"

It was Helen's voice, clear as a crystal in his brain.

His fingers knotted until the veins stood out like whip cords on the backs of his hands. But his voice was steady when it came.

"No, Mr. Mullaney. I haven't seen a soul."

III

THE rear hall of the St. Stephen extended the entire width of the building. It was seldom used, two sets of elevators draining the influx of the lobby and the entrance of the ballroom giving directly upon the main hall. There was no one in sight when the slight gray figure slipped from the door of the anteroom into the red-carpeted, softly lighted vestibule.

There was a side entrance leading off the hall, ending in a revolving glass door for the use of those conservative guests who preferred its semi-seclusion to the great marble lobby and its fleet of cushion-warmers.

It was toward this blessedly isolated refuge that the girl now turned; then, warned by that curious sixth sense she flung one furtive look over her shoulder.

A figure loomed in sight down the red vista—a tall man, coming at more than the usual walk. The girl was filled with sudden panic and it was by an almost superhuman effort that she forced herself to walk rapidly away instead of running as her terror urged her to do.

Once around the bend in the wall, however, she broke into a run, her feet seeming to her excited mind to drag with the horrible lack of progress felt in some dreams. The man turned the corner before she reached the revolving door; still coming straight toward her. Frantically the girl flung herself against the door, terrified lest he be the house-detective already warned of the necklace's disappearance.

The cool night air rushed on her hot face gratefully and she fairly fell down the steps; seeing, from the corner of her eye that black figure still coming; perilously near by now.

The street extended on each side of the hotel, brightly lighted for blocks, and filled with but a slight scattering of people. It would be easy to trace a fleeing figure there. The girl stood for a moment in agonized indecision—then she saw her way out.

A long blue machine had pulled up beside the curb; its engine beating sullenly while the solitary man at the wheel lit a cigaret. Even as its startled driver looked up the girl was fumbling with the catch on the front door, her words tumbling incoherently from her lips.

"Please help me—drive me away from here—anywhere—only be quick! I can't stop to explain—he'll be here. For Heaven's sake, hurry—please!"

The match flickered up toward the young man's fingers unnoticed while he stared open-mouthed at this latest apparition. Automatically he reached over and opened the door, but it was not until the girl flung herself in and huddled down on the seat beside him that he electrified into animation.

Cigaret and match were thrown overboard, his eyes jerked to the road ahead, the big car, slammed into gear, squirmed its way across the rushing traffic of Market Street and shot up one of the dark right-angled arteries which lead off to the south section of the city.

Blocks of narrow dark houses and stores whirled by them, intersected by dismal vacant lots—for much of this part of San Francisco still speaks of the fire of twelve years ago. A few lighted oases appeared—cheap rooming-houses or all-night restaurants, breaking the blackness at uncertain intervals. The city grew lonely, quiet, spreading out into the flat, poverty-stricken Potrero.

Only when several blocks lay between them and brightly lighted Market Street did the girl abandon her tense pose, confident that they were not being followed.

As if sensing her relaxation, the driver slacked the speed of the machine until he could safely turn his head to look at her.

He was good to look at, this young man. The elegant society favorite stamped on him from the immaculate dress tie, visible under the loosened black silk muffler, to the expensive dancing pump whose polished tip was resting on the throttle. Straight black brows almost met over a keen, clever nose, giving a Roman cast to his handsome face. His black eyes were at once curious and admiringly appraising as they rested on the girl.

IN THE pale glare of a passing arc light she smiled wanly up at him, her lips tremulous with strain. Then she drew a long breath.

"I don't know how I'll ever thank you," she began simply. "I know you're wondering what in the world I've done. You—you must have thought I was crazy when I threw myself at you that way."

"Well, I gathered that you were—slightly impatient."

He showed his even white teeth for a moment.

At the raillery in his tone the girl's eyes dropped confusedly, then looked almost defiantly up to meet his gaze.

"It all looks rather silly, looking back on it now—but I was just desperate. I work at Hoyt & Brainard's; I'm a manikin—a fashion model. I put on expensive dresses so that customers can see how they'll appear. Oh, I know—" as her glance followed his surprised look toward the golden flounces of the dress which showed between the front parting of her coat—"you're wondering how I came to be dressed like this and going to the St. Stephen Hotel, when I'm only a fashion model."

She tilted her chin up like one who resolves to have it all over with.

"I had this dress on late this afternoon when I was called to the telephone. We're not allowed to be called to the phone when we're on the floor but I slipped into the booth, dress and all. I didn't expect to be there so long but when I came out the closing bell was ringing. I was awfully afraid they would be angry so I ran to the fitting-room and tried to take it off, but it hooks down the back and I couldn't reach it.

"All the girls had gone home," she continued. "There wasn't a soul there but the manager of our floor and he—he's an old grouch." She made a little face. "He was angry because I was so late and I didn't dare tell him I'd been phoning. I tried to take the dress off until I grew nearly desperate.

"He scolded me through the door and finally I was afraid to wait any longer. I grabbed up my long coat and flung it on—it covered the dress all up and he never knew I wasn't in my own clothes when I ran by him. I thought I could go down to work early tomorrow and change before any one suspected the dress was gone.

"Then, when I came home, I got to thinking—I knew the Gaddis-Neville wedding was to occur tonight and I was just dying to see it. I'd heard so much about it from customers who came to the store and it seemed like a Heaven-sent chance."

She hesitated to look pleadingly into the eyes of the man watching her so interestedly. The big machine was purring along slowly through the darkness, the man had throttled it down to hear the plaintive voice better. Now he smiled encouragingly and the girl continued:

"So I went. It was such fun; no one suspected I didn't have a right there." Tom's eyes rose accusingly in her conscience at this, but she hurried on. "I mingled with the crowd and a couple of men thought they'd been introduced to me and had forgotten my name and they danced with me—it was fine while it lasted, then—oh, it seemed as if my heart stood still—I heard a fat woman talking excitedly—I heard her saying 'I've been robbed—Mr. Gaddis, my necklace is gone—my emerald necklace,' and then every one got excited and I heard a man say something about them searching every one and making sure they had a right to be there—oh, it was dreadful."

The gray eyes flooded with fear at the remembrance and in the gleam of the cowl-light the pale gold tendrils of her hair appeared to cling about her white face in terror.

"And then what did you do?" the man asked gently.

The girl jerked her eyes from the dark road ahead and looked up into his face again.

"I ran away. I know it made me look guilty but don't you see—I didn't dare say who I was—they'd dismiss me at the store for daring to wear a dress out of there and I'd never get another position in San Francisco. I was out of work once and I was afraid—afraid——"

Her voice died to a whisper then she appeared to give herself a mental shake and took a fresh start:

"I ran away before they could search me," she glossed over Tom's breach of faith with a grateful little reservation. "But as I was going down the hall, I saw a man walking quickly toward me, I was afraid I was followed and when I saw your car I thought only of getting away."

Impulsively she leaned closer to the man, whose gaze enveloped her with a half-amused tenderness. Her eyes were almost tragically grateful as she looked up at him.

"Oh, I don't know how to thank you—it would have been so dreadful for me. I can't tell you how grateful I——"

She stopped, suddenly aware of some subtle change in her companion. His face appeared to have slipped on a wooden mask, the black eyes narrowed, looking intently at the flounce of the troublesome golden dress.

Instinctively the girl's gaze followed his and her lips parted in a gasp. Green and wicked in the glare of the cowl-light; seeming to coruscate with diabolical glee at each slight vibration of the machine, swung the two stolen emeralds. Only their odd square setting and a tiny strand of the golden chain was visible, and that merely because some impetuous movement on the girl's part had disarranged the upper flounce of the gold gown. It was a careless chance which had shown them to the man—when she was standing up the overlapping flounce of the dress would conceal them.

The silence which followed seemed heavy, the humming of the motor beat in the girl's ears as a muffled roar. The man's words seemed physical blows on her consciousness:

"Pretty slick; pret-ty slick. You nearly got away with it, sister, but not quite—and that's where I come in. Don't make any mistake, 'Blondie,' this is a fifty-fifty job."

IV

IT WAS a full minute before the girl spoke, in a queer, choked tone.

"Why—how did that get there——"

She reached over and raising the golden flounce released the clasp of the necklace from the mesh of pearls which interlaced it.

As the smooth, cool stones slipped through her fingers, a thousand varying shades of green shot through the gems. They seemed alternately to pale and flush with color, like living things, now filled with the clear, transparent green of sunlight seen through sea-water; now richly dark, almost black in their deep hearts. Twin emeralds—no Uralian stones these, nor yet the Brazilian emeralds, which are mere green tourmalin; but the perfect Oriental emerald, sisters to those marvelous gems mined long ago from the hot sands of Jebel Zabara that they might glow royally against Cleopatra's black hair.

For the first time the girl seemed to grasp the enormity of the theft. She raised fascinated eyes to the man beside her.

At the sight of the jewels, a tense watchfulness had supplanted the boyish poise of the driver. The handsome black eyes had narrowed, filled with an amusement which appeared sinister to the girl's terrified gaze.

He showed his fine white teeth in a silent laugh.

"The game's played out, Blondie, can't you see it? You did some pretty keen work—why you almost had me fooled there for a time. Lord, oh, Lord, won't Cleete and the boys appreciate this!"

He went off into a silent fit of laughter.

The girl had shrunk to the side of the seat, the stones allowed to slide together carelessly in her lap.

"What do you mean?" but she asked it automatically, as one on whom a light is breaking.

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!"

Her simple question seemed to afford even greater amusement to the man. Then his manner suddenly changed. He straightened up severely.

"Look here, Blondie; don't over-act or you'll begin to bore me. You might as well make up your mind to split three ways on this job. Yourself—me and Cleete. Maybe you could have gotten away with it if you hadn't stumbled on my car—say that was the richest yet—but you're no fool. You must realize you couldn't get rid of that thing this side of the Rockies at least, without coming through to Cleete. This playing a lone hand may go back East, but remember, you're spotted easier out here. There aren't so many of us and if we begin backbiting and double-crossing—well," he finished with grim humor, "there'll be still less."

"But I don't understand," insisted the girl. She had conquered her first terror and her eyes met the man's almost defiantly. "I was telling you the truth. I don't know how I got the necklace and what's more, I don't know how I'll give it back without them finding at the store that I wore the dress——"

"Take off your hat," the man suddenly ordered.

There was an expression in his eyes which prompted the girl to obey hastily.

With the broad-brimmed hat away, a mass of golden hair toppled on to her shoulders. It was hair which would be noticeable anywhere, a crown for a princess. Fine silky strands of a peculiar metallic luster, the pale hue of virgin gold; with an odd frosty light in the loose waves.

The man took a strand in his hand, apparently unaware that the girl shrank involuntarily away; and examined it intently. When he looked up again his eyes were mocking.

"Cut the comedy, Blondie. You're certainly as slick as they say you are, but get it through your head that the game's played out."

A thrill of combined fear and anger shook the girl but by a desperate effort she controlled her voice.

"I've told you the truth, I don't know what you mean by 'Cleete.' You don't think I deliberately took that necklace, do you?"

The man turned to her sharply as one would to an ill-bred persistent child.

"Of course not. I believe in fairies—they hooked it into your skirt, that's all. Now look here, Blondie, it was told around the club that you were coming from the East. We're prepared to welcome you all right, but you've got to understand that every game you play out West here, Cleete stands in on. We back each other up, Blondie, because we have to. It's safer." His words seemed to hold a double meaning. "You can't buck the combination; it's bigger than you are."

For a moment the big car hummed along silently, then the man spoke again.

"That was clever stuff you pulled in Mobile; and the Mardi Gras business in New Orleans—after seeing you I think you could do bigger work than this trinket-lifting," with a half-contemptuous glance at the glowing green in the girl's lap, "but having the system is only half the battle out here; you've got to have the club behind you and God help you if you double-cross Cleete!"

As he finished speaking, the machine suddenly leaped into life and spurted down the San Bruno Road, a lonely highway following the shore-line of the back bay, winding past railroad yards, tanneries and dismal, straggling little farms worked by Italians and Portuguese.

To the girl's frantic pleading the man gave one curt reply.

"We're going to the club."

At San Bruno, the blue car turned again into the main highway purring down to the conservative thirty miles an hour gait. Other machines whizzed by them. More than one indulgent smile was thrown their way as cars caught up, jogged alongside for a brief moment then darted ahead. A good-looking young man in evening clothes and a pretty girl—it was only too evident they were taken for a couple of sweethearts on a lark. Twice the girl narrowly stifled the scream for help which rose in her throat, only to remember in time, the damning evidence in her hand.

The clock dial pointed to midnight; still the blue machine hummed along, never sinking below the thirty-an-hour point, yet never exceeding it. It was evident that the astute young man at the wheel was running no chance of being "pinched" with its attendant embarrassing explanations.

Tree-shaded Burlingame rushed by, then San Mateo; nearly dark at this hour. It was only when the machine swerved from the smooth asphalt of the highway and turned west on a bumpy dirt road that the girl became watchfully alert again.

An old picket fence, its whitewash flaked off in great patches suddenly sprang up on the edge of the road. A few seconds later they slowed before a semi-circular iron gate surmounted by two old-fashioned iron lamps, once marvels of workmanship, but now corroded and unlit. Unseen mechanism, worked by the wheels of the car passing over an iron plate in the ground, swung the great gates slowly inward and they rolled up a long avenue of gloomy eucalyptus trees.

The girl was leaning forward in the seat now, her hands tightly clenched, her eyes wide. The place was evidently a fair-sized rather shiftlessly worked farm. In the moonlit patches between the trees she could see small regular hay piles, casting round-topped black shadows seemingly as solid as themselves. Two straggling rows of vegetables, artichokes, apparently, kept pace with the driveway.

* * *

AT THE end of the gravel drive, a patch of eucalyptus, containing a house, loomed squarely in their way. A gaunt high house, built in the gloomy style of the '50's, with tortuous scrollwork emphasizing each high blank window and outlining the deep narrow doorway.

A Spanish veranda ran the width of the upper story, its perpendicular railings emphasized by the moonlight so grotesquely that it took on the appearance of grinning.

The gravel driveway led to the front steps, broad and shallow, then swept semicircularly around and disappeared in the rear. The whole effect was deserted. One of the high windows which looked out each side of the door, was entirely boarded up, from within; the glass panes of the other glistened blankly in the moonlight.

At the sinister appearance of the house the girl's face went white and she seized the door with a half-formed idea of leaping out and taking her chance in a foot-race between the trees. Before this plan could harden into resolution the blue car had swept around to the rear of the place.

Here the trees pressed so closely on the building that their rustling branches scraped the wooden veranda overhead which duplicated the one in front.

The machine abruptly slowed, then stopped. The driver killed the engine and turned to the tense girl beside him.

"All right, Blondie, now, if you'll be so kind as to step out——"

He reached over and unfastened the catch on the door, not appearing to notice the girl's involuntary shrinking as his sleeve brushed her knees. Mutely she obeyed him. Her necklace was gripped convulsively in her hand until the settings cut into the palm.

The two shallow steps which led to the porch were ankle-deep with drifted eucalyptus leaves. Everything spoke of the greatest desolation.

The man put his hand under the girl's elbow courteously to help her to the porch—his manner was irreproachable, they might have been at the St. Stephen. Even in the tension of the moment, the girl was cognizant of the startling picture they must make. The moon sifting through the trees cast black shadows on the porch below. It traced the young man's profile against the dark background of the door with cameo-like clearness, the black meeting arch of his eyebrows causing him to appear more Roman warrior-like than ever.

The white front of his dress-shirt gleamed beneath the loosened muffler and the unbuttoned overcoat. He stood with his head bent slightly to one side as though listening intently, the while his knuckles beat a careless tattoo as one will do with a mind half-abstracted from the business in hand. Under his breath, as though by chance, he was whistling the opening bars of "La Paloma," slightly prolonging the plaintive minor notes.

The girl had shrunk against the rickety balustrade of the porch, her fascinated gaze fixed on the man's profile. In the white flood of moonlight her hair took on a frosty light, almost unearthly so pale gold did it become. Her deep-set gray eyes became almost black in the shadow. In the gap of her coat the telltale gleam of the golden dress flashed out, the sewn pearls gleaming opalescently as though claiming kinship with the moonlight.

Twice the young man tapped in seeming indifference, but the astute gaze of the girl saw his head bend even closer and his brows became one unbroken line in impatience. The house apparently remained as deserted as before. Then, although she had heard no noise, the girl was startlingly aware that other eyes were upon them.

Without changing her position in the slightest she shifted her eyes from the man's face to the left side of the door. The door-frame was a mass of intricate carving. Even as she looked the wind swayed a branch of the complaining eucalyptus and the moonlight flooded the porch.

It was only for a breath's space but long enough for the girl to see that a portion of the door-jamb was missing—a narrow slot about six inches by two between a couple of clumsy scrolls. Where it had been the moon glistened upon the whites of two eyes silently regarding them. Black eyes, like two beady shoe-buttons, stuck in the door-jamb.

The girl smothered the scream that rose in her throat, but the palms of her hands went cold and wet. There was something so sinister in that silent, unblinking scrutiny that the girl, sick with terror, was reaching for the man's arm when the eyes vanished and the missing portion of woodwork reappeared.

V

THE door swung slowly inward. The room was velvet black, save where the moon sought out chinks in the closed shutters and pointed long white fingers through them to fall in splinters on the bare floor. As the man and girl stepped over the threshold a match flared up, to show them a dark-faced man touching it to the wick of a kerosene lamp.

He replaced the chimney on the lamp and taking it in his hand turned toward them, his grotesque black shadow suddenly leaping up the wall behind him until it shot half-way across the shadowy ceiling.

In the swift, shrinking glance the girl flung about the room she saw nothing more than might have been expected from the outside of the house. A stove, red with rust, and propped under one rickety leg with bricks, occupied one corner. A wood-box, half-filled, grew on the eye out of the shadows. From rude shelves, visible in the wavering dusk came the metallic gleam of pots and pans. Three old and scarred rush-bottomed chairs intruded themselves in the flickering radius of the lamplight.

The tenant himself bore out the general appearance—a Portuguese farmer from the silent evidence of his soiled checked shirt and the mud-spattered trousers.

No words passed between the two men. It was evident that this scene had become so commonplace as to be undeserving of comment. The Portuguese held the lamp slightly aloof and walked ahead of them to a door which gradually became visible as the light moved across the bare room.

The other man turned to his companion courteously.

"Straight ahead, Blondie, if you please."

For a brief moment the girl fought a loathing to venture further in that house of mystery, then, realizing how little good objection would do her, she nervously moistened her dry lips and followed the will-o'-the-wisp of light.

The Portuguese had started down a long hall as bleak and dark as the kitchen had been, his heavy-soled boots making a hideous clamor on the uncarpeted floor.

Midway up the hall he paused and opening a door, stood aside to let them enter.

The girl caught her breath audibly. The sudden contrast was startling, even dramatic. It was a room magically conjured out of Monte Cristo's palace and fitted up with the same kingly magnificence. The walls themselves were ebony—ebony inlaid with the milky whiteness of mother-of-pearl. Even the floor was of the same dark wood, polished until it shone like the back of a Maratta shield. And this black splendor was merely the casket to make more marvelous the jewels it held.

By contrast the rugs on the floor appeared to glow; rugs, which even to a novice proclaimed their priceless lineage. No tawdry imitations these, anilin-dyed and acid-washed to deceive the infidel; but silk rugs from Persia, made in the golden age of rugs, their pile but lightly worn and their mellow colors still unfaded though five centuries had passed since slim brown fingers had tied the Sehna knots.

In the amber light of the hanging lamps above them their blue hearts seemed to pulsate with the very intensity of color, with the old lost Persian blue. The leafy scrolls—for they were not of the pattern of the Sunni, that austere Mohammedan sect, but reflected instead the freer Shiah as could be seen by the topaz cartouches enclosing Kufic inscriptions—appeared to sway as though stirred to life by a miraculous wind.

Nor was this all; the eye wandered beyond the seven mica-shaded lamps swinging from the shadowy ceiling; strayed by the throne-like chairs of ebony, fascinating by reason of the unrelieving black velvet cushions which turned them into silhouettes; and lingered enthralled upon the vases which surrounded the room and gleamed jewel-like out of the mellow dusk. Here even the kindling shades of the rugs were outdone; the effect was a symphony in color—and such color as only an artist De Quincey might dream.

Pale jasper over carved gold; ruby; sapphire; transparent violet over white, semé with golden stars; the glorious contrast of purple and cobalt over foil and the deeper notes of ivory, black and orange—the matchless enamel of priceless cloisonné.

Even before she noticed the occupants of the room the girl drank the background in; not even her fear sufficing to deaden her amazement. Then she became aware that two men had ceased their low-toned conversation and, quietly alert, were regarding her from the depths of the cushioned chairs.

Her companion nodded carelessly to one; greeted the other, wrapped in a dark green silk lounging robe with a casual, "How are you, Clieve?" and, still steering the girl before him, advanced to meet a figure which now appeared between two heavy velvet curtains across the large room.

"A little surprise for you, Cleete," he spoke lightly, but there was a certain deference in his manner which did not escape the girl. "We have in our midst, Blondie, accompanied by the Chetwynd emeralds."

In spite of the perilous position in which she found herself the girl's eyes widened in surprise as they took in the small, almost pudgy figure, the pale-colored hair, and the mild inquiring blue eyes behind the thick glasses. That this was the cleverest "fence" on the Pacific coast seemed ridiculous. He might have been a divinity student, inadvertently wandered into an exclusive gentlemen's club and a trifle incongruous with his surroundings. His manner of greeting the girl heightened this impression. He turned again to the man.

"Didn't expect you tonight, Trevillion. Croix was in about an hour ago, looking for you."

Trevillion laughed.

"I expected to meet him but ran into Blondie instead. The story's too good to keep."

He started to laugh again, then, in reply to Cleete's mildly inquiring look he related the circumstances of the meeting.

When he finished he looked again at the girl, from narrow, amused eyes.

"Going to 'fess up, Blondie, and admit that you were trying to deceive the handsome stranger?"

The girl's face had gone deathly white, a fine little dew had sprung out on her forehead and beaded her upper lip, but her amused laugh rang true.

"You've got me all right, but really, you didn't think I was going to open my heart to the first kind man who gave me an auto ride, did you? I knew you recognized me as Blondie—it was my hair did the trick, wasn't it—but you see I wasn't so sure of you. I thought you were playing a lone hand and just bluffing about the club and—and Cleete."

She faltered a trifle over the name, then rushed on.

"I thought you were working it to get the emeralds for yourself and I was going to call your bluff. You don't suppose that I pulled that Mobile business and the Boston game you mentioned by giving up the stuff to the first person who hailed me by my name!"

Trevillion was entranced.

"It was worth a million to watch you work it, Blondie. Why really, she had me guessing there at the first."

He turned to his chief.

BUT the other man was not disposed to follow his lead. A surprising change had come over him. As Trevillion had related with glee the girl's protestations of innocence, Cleete had transferred his gaze to her and she now raised her eyes to receive the full force of his stare. His face wore an expression she had not deemed him capable of, the heavy lids of his eyes were rolled back and the irises, rather terrifyingly enlarged by the lenses of the glasses, belched forth a steady blue flame. For the first time the girl sensed the innate power of the man.

His voice, too, was as crisp as the snapping of dried twigs.

"None of that, Blondie. You've got to fall in line on this coast. I figured you'd try something like this; so did Riddle. He said you'd try to play a lone hand when he tipped me off that you were coming."

The threat in his tone was only half-veiled. The girl's face went a shade whiter and she interrupted half-hysterically:

"But I didn't, I didn't! I was going to come here to—to split on the emeralds, but I wasn't sure of Trevillion. How did

I know he wasn't a cop trying to bluff me into admitting who I was? Of course when he really brought me here I knew it was all right, but I wasn't going to admit anything until I was dead sure."

Trevillion's black eyes regarded her admiringly.

"That's good logic, Cleete. If Blondie wasn't clever enough to watch her step, she couldn't pull the stuff she does."

The blue flame had died from the chief's eyes and he grunted noncommittally.

"All right, but in case Riddle didn't tip you off before you left the East, I will. This club isn't founded for sheerly social purposes—" with deep sarcasm—"it's for mutual protection and remember whatever you pull on this coast, the club stands in on. There aren't the big cities here that there are back East and it's harder to dispose of the stuff. If you're square with the club, the club will stand behind you and—another little tip, Blondie—you'll need the club before you get through. The East was getting pretty hot for you and in the West they'll spot you sooner. Don't forget which side your bread is buttered on. No one has ever double-crossed me—yet."

The last words would have been reassuring, but something sinister lurked behind the ominously quiet tone. It left the girl's fascinated eyes on Cleete's face, her tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth. Nor could she speak nor look away until he chose to remove his gaze.

"Now then, the emeralds," the man held out his hand imperiously.

Still under that hypnotic blue stare, the girl meekly pulled them out of her pocket and dropped them into his outstretched palm.

The man barely glanced at them. Their glorious green splendor might have been so much putty from the contemptuous manner in which his fingers closed over them. He led the way to the small room beyond. But for Trevillion's courteous clasp on her arm, the girl would have stood rooted to the spot, like a disciplined child, too terrified to move.

The small room was devoted almost entirely to a large round safe. Like the other it was lit by the same mica-shaded lamps. There were no windows in either room. It was evident that only the heart of the house was thus lavishly furnished, for through the space of a velvet curtain, the girl could catch a glimpse of a barren room beyond, gray with dust, the room of the boarded-up window.

When the Chetwynd emeralds had been flung loosely in the safe and the heavy door swung to on them, Cleete turned about. The fire had faded from his heavy-lidded eyes but a grim little line still ran about his mouth.

"This is a three-way split. It may be a month before I'll have a chance to get in touch with Riddle on this thing. Of course if you want any money advanced——"

"No!" the girl almost gasped it. "I—I have enough to get by on."

The chief shrugged and became almost miraculously the inoffensive, pudgy little figure he had first appeared. But the terror of that fierce revealment was still upon the girl and her relief, as Cleete left them and went out to the other room to meet a newcomer, was apparent to the amused Trevillion.

"Rather crimped you, didn't he, Blondie?"

He steered her reluctant steps to the large room again and indicated a chair.

For a brief moment the girl hesitated, casting a frightened look toward the door; then, as if the strength had suddenly gone out of them, her legs crumpled beneath her and she sank into the chair.

Trevillion flung himself into the one opposite where his evening clothes promptly merged into the background of the velvet cushions, leaving him merely a white shirt front and a detached face rather horribly swimming in a pool of blackness.

"That's the one thing that blights Cleete's young life," he explained lightly. "Any one slipping anything over on him," in answer to the girl's inquiring look. "Cleete's square; we know we can trust him and he makes us play quite as fair. He's right, too. It's only cooperation that has enabled us to play our games as long and as safely as we have."

He interrupted another nervous glance the girl was stealing toward the door and his voice grew a trifle sharp.

"Don't lose your nerve, Blondie, merely because of a little disciplining on Cleete's part. If this shakes you I don't see how you got away with that Mobile stuff."

His words acted as a tonic on the girl. She suddenly jerked her eyes back to his and forced a laugh.

"You want to remember I'm not used to him. I had no idea a person could change so—appear two such separate people——"

Trevillion nodded, as if she had scored.

"It's rather uncanny, Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde effect—Cleete's a strange man. I wouldn't take a chance on double-crossing him for the Kohinoor itself. I don't blame you though, for making the attempt—oh, don't be afraid that I'm going to give you away," at the girl's involuntary start of surprise. "I knew you were trying to get clean with the emeralds, but really it isn't safe, Blondie. Cleete would have got you in the end.

"Maybe Riddle didn't explain enough about us. We're unique—oh, there are gangs, of course, but we're more than a gang. We work the thing scientifically, or better yet, on business methods. Big stuff is all we bother with. And we specialize too. I do society—the same as you. Croix does the races, the stock game and anything where good-fellowship comes into play. That chap, Clieve, I spoke to as we came in," he nodded toward the man in the silk lounging-robe, "does the foreign minister stuff; he's a wonder at worming himself into diplomatic circles.

"We've got it down fine and that's why we're so safe. There's never anything crude pulled; none of our finger-prints are hanging around as art studies for zealous young detectives to memorize. Cleete receives the stuff and in due course we get the money. I don't know how he gets rid of it." He shrugged, a movement almost invisible against the cushions. "I don't know—none of us know. It's none of our business when you come down to it, so long as we get our share."

"But this—" The girl broke in hoarsely. The effort she was making to hold up her end of the conversation was evident. By main will she kept her longing glance from straying toward the door again.

"I—I never thought—I never saw—crooks—in a place like this."

Trevillion laughed silently, his black eyes narrowed to slits in his amusement until his face was like a sharp white mask.

"Cleete's idea—the club; and crooks—really, Blondie, I wish you wouldn't offend my sensibilities! Gentlemen adventurers, if you don't mind. Kipling knew—'We're poor little lambs who have lost our way; we're little black sheep who have gone astray.' While some of us may have reached this dizzy height via the second-story route, we pride ourselves on being esthetic. Nothing less than ten thousand for a job—it really doesn't pay by the time you split with Cleete."

"What's Cleete in it for?" The girl fired the question at him sharply. "It isn't for the money only is it? Look at the way he handled the emeralds."

TREVILLION gave her a commendatory glance.

"You hit it, Blondie. Not the money—that is, for the money's sake. He doesn't give a hang about it; it's to gratify his one passion."

Trevillion was perfectly serious now; it was evident that the peculiar character of Cleete had taken possession of his imagination strongly.

"All men have some main passion in life. With some it's women—it's drink with some, or making money, but Cleete doesn't care for a red cent. It's cloisonné vases with him. Heaven knows where he gets them, but he spends thousands on a little piece of enamel no bigger than your fist. Says it's the highest expression of art. I believe he'd commit murder for a bit of ware he'd set his heart upon."

The man's matter-of-fact tone chilled the girl; but her nervous tremor went unnoticed by Trevillion, who had turned to hail the chief as he passed behind their chairs.

"I'm telling Blondie about your vases," he explained as easily as if this was a casual ballroom conversation.

Now the heavy lids were rolled back but this time the eyes were wide with interest. The fanatical gleam of the connoisseur burned in Cleete's gaze. His other purpose was instantly forgotten and he lingered by their chairs.

"Hundreds of them," he waved his hand toward the rich gleam of the vases visible through the amber-shaded gloom, "and every one a gem. Crisaille, basse-taille—oh, a perfect example of that, the gold most exquisitely carved—champlevé enamel too, but mostly cloisonné. That is what I am focusing on. I have them all, perfect examples of the rare tourquoise blue and one vase of vesica-shaped medallions which rivals the pala d'oro of St. Marks."

The girl's eyes were fixed fascinated on his transfigured face though his words were as so many empty sounds to her ears. The pudgy features, through some trick of expression had suddenly become elongated; they were sharp, ravenous even—the look of a wolf on the trail.

"Look at this!"

His voice was tremulous with intense feeling; the hand which had flung two matchless emeralds so carelessly into the safe, now reverently displayed the six-inch vase in his hand.

"A perfect specimen of the highest Byzantine period. A jewel! See—the purest primary coloring—it was not until centuries later that they discovered the subtle shadings, you know." He turned the barbaric little object tenderly in his hand to display the rich reds and blues. "Cloison of purest copper and see the velvet depth of that black enamel."

"Priceless—priceless!" he was whispering to himself, his prominent blue eyes held hypnotically by the object in his hand. "The most exquisite art—beauty passed through thought and fixed in form!" He suddenly jerked his head up and the blank gleam in his eyes turned them quite mad. "Two colors only I lack—two colors—the unknown lemon yellow in a vitrified state and opaque vermilion—they say there is no ware of that—that it has never been discovered, but I know better—there is."

His face grew radiant

"One vase—peerless—I saw it once—I held it in my hands." His eyes seemed to coruscate with their sudden lust for possession. "To think that I held it in my hands! The priceless, secret vermilion; deep bright lights in its depth like a pigeon-blood cloisonné, but yellow—glorious as an Autumn sunset. It had cost fortunes—it had cost lives—it was the pinnacle of beauty; I held it in my hands—and I let it be taken away."

Cleete's voice, which had grown hysterically shrill, sank to a whisper on the last words. The lids of his eyes drooped. It was as though a film was drawn between their mad blue fire and the spellbound couple in the chairs. Abruptly he turned on his heel and left them.

Even Trevillion's debonair manner was shaken by Cleete's tirade. The girl was unable to control a long slow shudder of morbid fear.

"He's crazy!"

Trevillion busied himself with a cigaret for a moment before he replied.

"Perhaps. Every one is more or less of a monomaniac on some subject. Why not cloisonné ware as well as old masters? Lives and fortunes have been lost for them. Cleete is merely original. His passion will undoubtedly some day cause his death," he finished, in a calmly judicial tone.

Again the girl was shaken by a shudder and the smile she forced on Trevillion was a ghastly failure.

"Please take me home—back to the city. I—I'm always all in after a job like I pulled tonight."

She led the way gamely to the door, forcing herself to walk easily; no one would have guessed that the rugs and walls and gleaming vases were all swimming before her in a mad blaze of color. Her hands were clinched until the nails drove little half-moons into the palms; if Trevillion had touched her she would have screamed hysterically. The dark face of the Portuguese coming suddenly out of the shadows turned her weak with fright.

Then the night air, gratefully clean and cool fell like a benediction on her upturned feverish face.

VI

AT HALF-PAST five, Mrs. Sproule raised her drowsy head from the pillow to listen to a stealthy noise in the hall outside her door. It was a brushing, shuffling sound.

For a moment the good lady lay resembling an "L" on its back then, with sigh like the intake of a vacuum-sweeper, she dropped her head back to the horizontal position and proceeded to make the most of the half-hour nap left. It was only the cat, most likely.

But Mrs. Sproule was doing the cat an injustice. The cat was curled up behind the coat scuttle. It was Tom Fleming, tastefully arrayed in overcoat and pajamas, going down to the front porch to get the morning paper.

Just what Tom expected to find in the paper he had not dared to admit to himself. His sleep had been a tortuous string of emerald-studded dreams and the faint thud which announced the advent of the morning paper had sent him creeping barefooted down the stairs after it.

There it was—a column and a half on the front page, under a two-column cut of Mrs. Chetwynd in a pose which showed off the lost necklace and her double chin to advantage.

Tom curled his cold toes under him and plunged in. At the end he was both relieved and contemptuous. There was no mention of the single unbidden guest who had slipped through the door of the ante-room nor of the faithless young man who had let her go. Helen Mercer had got safely away—thanks to his own gullibility—so had the Chetwynd emeralds.

By all the law of logic, Tom's mind should have been the opposite of somber. He had taken part in a drama which should have spread the purple and gold of romance over his mental skies. To be sure there was the chagrin of letting a twenty-thousand-dollar necklace slip through his fingers, so to speak; but it was not this which caused Tom to fling his clothes at himself so savagely, nor yet his broken word to Mullaney.

Nor again, was it the fact that to Helen Mercer he must appear an easily impressed fool. It was something deeper still; the hurt realization that gray eyes could look into his so candidly and still lie; the memory of an appealing face framed in pale gold, a face childlike in its frightened innocence, whose expression now he knew to be the consummate point of art.

That thought was a wound which welled the venom of distrust until Tom's whole world became tinged with the same horrid hue. It was altogether unlikely that the girl would ever set foot in the O'Farrell Street house, or even that she had left any clue by which he could trace her; but that habit of thoroughness caused Tom to see the thing through so far as lay within his power.

But it was with little hope and still less tact that he introduced the subject as he stopped at the landlady's door on his way out.

"There's a girl living here—or was, rather—by the name of Helen Mercer," he began phlegmatically to the rather disarranged lady who answered his knock. "Do you know anything about her, Mrs. Sproule?"

The landlady's eyes wandered sharply over his grave young face while her hand strayed up and tucked in a kid curler which had escaped from under the limp net frill of the discouraged-appearing boudoir cap.

"No more than that I ain't had no complaints about her. She seems to be an honest young woman an' pays her rent in advance."

Her tone was acid and said that she saw no reason to give information about one lodger to another.

Tom continued, too dispirited to take offense.

"Do you know any of her friends, any way, so I could follow her up, I mean?"

"If you wait till six this evening, Mr. Fleming, she'll probably tell you herself."

The landlady's hands were placed belligerently on her hips. It was only the abject wretchedness on the young man's face which kept her from telling the fresh Mr. Fleming what she thought of this uncalled-for curiosity.

"She generally gets home about then."

Tom positively winced. He knew that Helen Mercer would never get home at six again. When he spoke again, it was so earnestly that the sharp remark forming on Mrs. Sproule's lips died a-borning.

"I'm awfully anxious to find out about Helen Mercer, Mrs. Sproule. If you can help me, I'll be more than grateful. I—I can't tell you just what for—" the pleading gray eyes of the night before seemed to swim in the air before him and in spite of himself he added—"it's nothing to her discredit, but I've simply got to find her."

Something of his wretchedness must have escaped in his tone for the landlady's words were sharper than her tone when she replied:

"Well, I guess you'll have to wait till tonight, no matter how important it is. She's already gone to work this morning."

Tom's spine straightened as if an electric current had suddenly been turned into it.

"You—did you say she was here—here this morning? She came home here last night?"

The landlady's lips pinched reprovingly.

"She certainly did. I make it my business to keep tab on my lodgers. Come in late, she did; but when a girl's young and pretty she'll be staying out late once in a while and I ain't narrow-minded; Miss Mercer is a lady——"

Tom interrupted her. The change in the young man was alarming. Mrs. Sproule found herself viewing him with decided alarm. With her words, the unreasoning hope that Helen Mercer could explain the apparently explainable, tingled through Tom's very finger-tips. She had come home! If she had taken the emeralds she wouldn't have done that. Maybe she had been sincere in her agitation the night before. Maybe Mullaney had overlooked the emeralds and they would yet be found without implicating Helen Mercer. The honest gray eyes hadn't lied—and she didn't think he was a soft-hearted fool!

The purple and gold rolled across the horizon again—once more the world was lit by pale gold hair and the radiance of gray eyes.

Tom was a little wild-looking. The impressionistic Mrs. Sproule took a backward step. She had heard of a case once where a young man just Tom's age had gone suddenly mad and chased his aged father up into an apple tree with a bread-knife.

"Mrs. Sproule—" odd how much music could be injected into that name—"where does Miss Mercer work?"

Tom fairly sang it and Mrs. Sproule eased herself still further into the safety zone.

"Hoyt & Brainard's," she snapped, and the door was closed on the enemy.

That night, at eight minutes to six, the crowds who passed a certain corner on Grant Avenue were edified by the sight of a young man stationed there, whose head was apparently set on a pivot. Hoyt & Brainard's block-square store had two entrances, one main one, leading upon Grant Avenue; the other, smaller, letting upon an alley running along one side. It was only when the six o'clock closing bell rang and the main entrance had disgorged its belated customers, that the gentleman with the versatile head was able to cease his double-barrelled watch and concentrate his vision on the small door which was beginning to trickle saleswomen, cash girls, buyers and department heads.

He received several coldly questioning looks when he started nervously after strange young ladies—these were always blondes, by the way—but he always recuperated and came back to root again on the spot which was beginning to be his under squatter's rights.

And then, among the last, she came. A hurrying little figure in the familiar gray coat, and her white face went whiter than ever when she saw him waiting for her.

The young man plunged in, breathless from the excitement gripping him.

"Miss Mercer, I just had to come down and meet you. I didn't know whether you'd go home for dinner, you know, and I couldn't wait another minute." He had tucked his hand under her elbow to help her off the curb quite as though it was not the first time he had done it. "I've been on pins and needles to see you—after last night, you know. You promised to tell me about it—I'm curious, although I always knew you hadn't taken the necklace."

And he had known! Of course he had! Maybe he had pretended to himself that he had doubted her but down in his heart he had known all the time that she hadn't taken it. Why, you could bank every time on gray eyes that looked straight at you. A girl like that couldn't do anything crooked if she were to try!

Throughout the mad torrent of his speech the girl had let her glance drop to the sidewalk. A little pucker of indecision appeared between the slim golden brows. Twice she had started to interrupt and had checked herself. Now she regarded him with a long silent scrutiny from the corners of the gray eyes. When she did speak it was slowly as though she was having a hard time to find the words.

"Mr. Fleming, I'm going to tell you something because I have no one else to turn to. In a way I owe it to you—I'll never be able to thank you for letting me go last night." She gasped a little at the picture her fancy painted. "It would have been terrible for me, because—you see—I did have the emeralds."

Tom never knew that he stopped still. His legs ceased their motion automatically; his brain too stunned to send out even reflex orders. To the growing horror and disillusion on his face she continued:

"Oh, please, wait a minute—I didn't take them—not intentionally, that is. I didn't know a thing about it until later. I'll tell you everything, then I want you to tell me what to do."

Tom automatically began to walk again and as she kept pace the girl talked.

WHEN she finished, the young man's face was a study in conflicting emotions. His voice was awestruck when he spoke.

"What a little brick you are, Miss Mercer, to keep your head like that! Why, I know I couldn't do as well—and I wanted to be a detective," he finished a little self-contemptuously.

"Oh, no!" The girl almost winced from his praise and the faint pink flowed into her pale cheeks. "Any one would have done what I did. It was self-preservation, Mr. Fleming. I had to—to play safe," she explained simply. "It was not until I was right in the club, right before that terrible Cleete that I realized it all. Before then it was like some horrible practical joke, but that man's eyes—they changed so—" she shivered again—"I just grew sick all day thinking what might have happened if they'd happened to find out they'd made a mistake.

"I pretended to be this Blondie, of course—I was afraid to ask any questions for fear they would grow suspicious, but I tried to remember all the man called Trevillion had said about her and act up to it. I don't see now how I ever did it."

The girl's hands were working nervously. As an automobile slid up behind her with a low warning growl she jumped and shrank closer to Tom.

"It seemed an eternity until I dared to get away from that horrible house."

"How did you get home?" Tom asked.

"Trevillion drove me back in the car," she answered without hesitation. "I didn't want him to know where I lived so I told him the Kingsbury Hotel. It was very late and dark when we got there, so I hid in the entrance until he had driven away. Then I ran home."

Tom was unable to hide his admiration. "You clever little thing!"

The girl shook her head vigorously to hide her embarrassment.

"Mr. Fleming, what shall we do? That necklace is around my conscience like a millstone. When the papers came out with that long story about it this morning I wanted to run away and hide, I felt so guilty. I could hardly bear to meet people—to come to work—but I had to return that gold dress before they discovered it was gone. Oh, why did I ever do such a silly thing as to wear it? Now I don't know what to do."

"Got to turn the evidence over to the police, I suppose."

Tom's tone was reluctant. He would have preferred seeing this thing through in story-book fashion. The detective hero in the movies and the best-sellers invariably works independent of the forces of law and order who are introduced only to show up the hero's own superior methods.

The suggestion appeared to fill the girl with alarm.

"No—oh, no!" Her voice was sharp with protest. "Not the police—the whole thing would come out then." In reply to his look of involuntary surprise, her tone grew a trifle calmer. "Don't you see, if the store discovered that I wore the gold dress without permission I'd never be able to get another position in this city. Oh, please—Mr. Fleming—can't you think of any other way?"

It was too much in league with his own secret ambitions. Tom capitulated with shameful alacrity.

"Well, of course there must be a way to get the emeralds back without yelling to the whole world about it. Other fellows have done things like that."

He scowled intently for a moment and the only sound was the ring of their heels on the pavement. They were walking up O'Farrell Street now, where the apartment houses lined the blocks like enormous soap-boxes; their lighted windows appearing as holes revealing a center candle. The fog was already topping the hill behind the great red cathedral. The girl buttoned the collar of her coat closer about her neck, her grave eyes fixed on the young man's face.

"Say—I've got it—I think," Tom drawled at length, his tongue lingering over the words while his mind flashed back over the plan which was solidifying in his brain. "It's kind of risky though. It'd work if you had nerve enough to follow, but—look here."

In his enthusiasm he tucked the girl's arm close within his own, his head bent close to her pale gold hair.

"We'll hire a machine—or maybe we can borrow one—well, never mind that anyway."

He took a fresh grip on the arm.

"Look here. We'll go down there in a machine, you and I, tonight maybe. We'll drive up to this place, taking care no one sees me—can you drive a car? Fine," at her nod. "You're supposed to be alone, see. Well, you go in—we'll have to cook up some excuse for you going there but that's a mere detail—and while this Portuguese fellow's taking you in I'll climb up on that porch affair you said ran along the back of the house and get in a window—or some way.

"Meanwhile you're keeping this Cleete busy talking in the club rooms so I have a chance to sneak into the little room and steal the necklace back. Then all we have to do is make our get-away."

He waved his hand as if that was a mere bagatelle.

To his disappointment the girl was not overwhelmed in ecstasy at this attractive plan.

"It sounds rather vague," she said slowly.

"Well, of course I haven't worked it all out yet—however if you want to chuck the whole business, I guess Mrs. Chetwynd can buy more——"

"Oh, no—no." The girl shook her head positively. "I was responsible for the necklace going out of the ballroom in the first place and I'm going to see that they are recovered. And—and—I'm afraid to tell the police," she added in a whisper.

"Well—I'll tell you what—I'll take a chance alone. I can find the place by myself and I guess I'll get in somehow——"

Again the girl interrupted him. Her eyes were almost indignant when she looked back at him.

"As if I'd let you do all that dangerous work alone," she exclaimed in loyal scorn. "I guess it could be done, if I had the courage," she reflected slowly.

"Of course it could," Tom pointed out eagerly. All the romance in the world was singing to him now. "It's simple but there's its strength. I'm sure we could get away with it."

"But the necklace is in the safe. Cleete locked it up. How would you get at it?"

"Oh, gee, that's right."

Tom was crestfallen. Again nothing broke the muffled silence of the fog but their own ringing footsteps. Then his resourceful mind found the solution.

"If we had a cracksman—a regular safe-opener, we could do it. You know—*Jimmy Valentine* stuff of sand-papering the finger-tips and working the combination. I've got a friend who can, maybe, get me one for a night." Tom spoke as if cracksmen could be rented like taxies.

The girl still looked doubtful, but Tom's imagination was working on all six cylinders now and was unstopable.

"Say, I'll bet any amount that we can call the trick. I'll bet that Mrs. Chetwynd has her little old emeralds back by the day after tomorrow and we pinch the whole—and we arrest the lot. It'll be a big feather in my cap and it'll pull Mullaney out of the deuce of a hole—I ought to do this much for Mullaney," he said virtuously. "By George, I will. Miss Mercer, you don't have to worry a bit. You'd better stay home in case there's any row and I'll get the emeralds back for you all hunky-dory."

He turned his head to find Helen Mercer's steady gaze upon him. There was an expression in those gray eyes which the young fellow could not quite fathom. Her tone betrayed amused toleration.

"Did you honestly think I'd stay at home while you were running all that danger to get the necklace back for me?"

Her lips curled into a peculiar little smile before she turned back to the foggy street again and her voice hardened with resolution.

"I'm ready to start with you, Mr. Fleming, whenever you say."

VII

MR. WILLIAM HARTSHORN was a specialist and his specialty was cracking safes. Mr. Hartshorn could crack the toughest safe that ever contained a banknote, with the same neatness and dispatch with which the average citizen cracks an almond.

Time had been when no gentleman in the profession had worried the authorities more by his tireless and efficacious methods, but of late the wheels of progress had been turning without carrying Mr. Hartshorn along with them.

Mr. Hartshorn's—or, to give him his common or garden name—"Honest Bill's" main trouble was obviousness. This is an age of camouflage when the successful crook, to get by, must resemble the rest of the respectable background. Honest Bill, on the other hand, could only play the game according to regulation rules. Just as the old-time barnstormer must have his tin armor, his paper snow-storm and his East Lynne music, so Honest Bill could only crack a safe to the accompaniment of dark lanterns, of gum shoes and jimmies.

And, as the beplumed *Hamlets* and

betighted *Richards* of the old days would rave against the drawing-room hero of this, who acts without shouting and dies without stamping, so did Honest Bill rave in his heart with the bitterest of professional jealousy against those members of the new régime who conducted their business with no other aids save their own nimble wits.

Neither could Honest Bill understand a fence such as Cleete. This again was a sign of the new complications the profession had taken on. But, though he was not in favor of the system, though he did not belong and knew better than to force his way into that exclusive club, he took the utmost care to give it no reason for offense. The cloisonné vase collector and his associates were feared among such as Honest Bill as all of "Big Tim's" North Beach gun-men had never been. And they were hated with all the zest of the unsuccessful for those who succeed.

All of which is merely prelude to the fact that, when correctly approached in regard to the little matter of opening the safe where the Chetwynd emeralds were serenely twinkling to themselves, Honest Bill was inclined to listen to reason.

Once only, had he hesitated, to look at Tom out of little suspicious eyes.

"Say, there ain't no joker in this thing? It ain't no frame-up?"

"Mullaney sent me," explained the young amateur detective, dismissing in that simple phrase the two hours' pleading, worrying and eloquence which had been brought to bear on the mystified Mullaney. Tom's explanation to the detective had been beautifully vague; he had a hunch which he thought would result in the return of the emeralds if it was properly followed up; said hunch requiring for a successful termination only one cracksman who would obey orders.

It is only fair to Mullaney to state that under ordinary circumstances this modest requisition would not have been supplied, but Mullaney was in no position to withstand pressure. Emeralds loomed large in his foreground; even hunches from amateur detectives were not to be overlooked—nor, on the other hand, to be too greatly encouraged. Mullaney, were the simple truth known, capitulated largely to be rid of Tom's flow of eloquence.

"Mullaney said that in view of that Marchmont affair, you'd——"

"'S all right—'s all right," put in Mr. Hartshorn quickly. "Don't you go gettin' excited an' givin' away no family hist'ries now. Mullaney's a square guy for a dick an' I'll turn a little deal to satisfy him," he added magnanimously.

There was a brief pause, during which Mr. Hartshorn's eyes seemed to grow still smaller and turn in until they finally merged into one.

"Besides," he continued bitterly, "it'll be nuts to me to even up on them swell guns. Between them an' burglar alarms it's gettin' so there ain't no profit in the game no more."

Why Tom didn't lose his position in the day which followed was one of those mysteries for which there is apparently no earthly explanation. When he wasn't thinking of the Chetwynd emeralds lying there in that isolated old house among the whispering eucalyptus, he was busy picturing a face surrounded by pale gold hair—hair with a curious frosty light in the waves, and the clearest and steadiest of gray eyes. The real-estate business was simply nowhere.

One ticklish bit of business Tom accomplished that day, in a way which caused him to address an insultingly patronizing glance at the pictured Napoleon over his desk. He asked permission to take out one of the firm's touring cars, volunteering the elastic information that he wanted to show some people the country. The sales manager, but half-listening, had grunted a reply to this little request—a noise which the young man chose to interpret as affable acquiescence.

THE night was just the sort he would have ordered for the business in hand—a night apparently just come up from the pit; a heavy fog rolling in from the ocean, blotting out the stars, its very density seeming to muffle the voice and stop the ears with cotton. It hung like a curtain over the highway, penetrating with a wet chill which caused Helen Mercer unconsciously to draw closer to the resolute young man at the steering-wheel, while Honest Bill in the tonneau slunk deeper in the collar of his overcoat and cursed Tom, Mullaney, the "swell guns" and the Chetwynd emeralds with true democratic impartiality.

Little was said on the way down. A few

short directions the girl gave when the roads branched, removing one hand—she had tucked them both into the opposite coat sleeve, muff-fashion—to designate the course.

Down the San Bruno Road, around the curving hills where the great invisible bay lapped below them, the machine hummed along, its headlights boring into the wall of fog forever rising twenty feet ahead.

The clock on the cowlboard showed eleven when they reached the bumpy dirt road leading west from the highway. Ever since they had left San Mateo behind the girl had been at tension; now she was sitting bolt upright on the edge of the seat, her eyes staring fixedly into the fog ahead. Her hair clung to her face in wet rings as Tom could see from the corners of his eyes.

His heart suddenly throbbed with the joy of being alive—what romance! Riding with a beautiful girl beside him; with an ex-cracksman in the rear seat and a loaded gun in his pocket; on his way to pick the safe of an exclusive crooks' club. *D'Artagnan* and *Monte Cristo* owed him nothing at all!

The girl's hand slipped suddenly over his on the wheel. She leaned closer until her breath was warm on his cheek.

"You'd better get out now and let me drive the car in alone. The house is right up there behind some trees. Quick before some one comes."

They had thoroughly agreed upon their course of action before they started, but Tom now hesitated even while he slipped from behind the wheel. The girl beside him had suddenly ceased to be a novel heroine in his mind; she was simply Helen Mercer and the young fellow found that the thought of letting her venture alone into that nest of dangerous men filled him with panic.

"Helen—do you think you'd better? Don't you think after all it's wisest for you to stay with the car and let Bill and me take our chances on getting in alone?"

For a long moment the girl in the driver's seat looked down into his eyes through the dusk, the torture of uncertainty playing over her face. Once she opened her lips with a little impetuous gasp as though to tell him something; then she shut it resolutely and the gray eyes wavered and jerked away.

"You're awfully good to run into this danger—for me."

She said it very softly. Her little gloved hand suddenly seized one of his and pressed it for a brief second to the cold curve of her cheek; then the wheel was jerked around and Tom found himself in the dripping shelter of a tree watching the disappearing red tail-light.

"Say boss," Honest Bill's voice sounded in the ear Helen Mercer's breath had warmed and woke Tom with a start from his rapturous reverie. "We'd better be moseying. We want to get in while the Portugee is takin' the lady in."

Tom morosely agreed. All the romance of the thing was gone now. He hated himself for having countenanced this mad scheme. He was afraid—horribly afraid, for the girl. To thunder with the Chetwynd emeralds and to thunder with Hoyt & Brainard's as well! If Helen Mercer was harmed Tom knew that all the emeralds in Jebel Sikait could never remove one atom of self-reproach from his heart. What a fool he had been—what an infatuated ass!

He was still calling himself names when they came in sight of the house. It loomed a gray ghost out of the fog; just as Helen had so carefully described it before they came here. Not a splinter of light shone from the shutters. One window, whose shutter had long since joined the dear departed, glistened blankly at them in hypocritical innocence.

It was hard to believe that all the De Quincey dreams of splendor could be concealed behind the weatherbeaten walls. Hard to think that the cleverest crooks on the Pacific coast were gathered together within, and that into their midst a calm-browed, frightened-hearted girl was venturing alone.

Tom nearly groaned aloud, then suddenly stiffened. It was too late to change matters now; the only thing which remained was to see it through as well as might be. He left the path and slipped between the trees closely followed by the cracksman.

Around to the back of the house they felt their way; for they had decided to enter by one of the upper windows. The boarded-up window in the room adjoining the safe was more direct, but infinitely more risky. Here the fog was so dense that they could just make out the headlights of the machine stopped on the path before them. Carefully they edged themselves out of the radius of the lights into the shelter of the eucalyptus tree whose branches scraped the sagging upper veranda.

Even as they reached it they heard the girl on the porch softly humming the same strain which Trevillion had whistled that other night.

"Up the tree."

Tom breathed it close to Honest Bill's ear. The cracksman nodded with pitying contempt. He had already grasped the smooth trunk with his arms and was perched in the branches above like some outrageous bird before Tom had taken more than two struggling heaves up the trunk. Not a sound had escaped, though to the young man's excited imagination, his own breathing sounded like the whistling of the Overland Mail. Below the girl still hummed her plaintive little air, one hand pressed tightly to her pounding heart.

When he reached the branch where the cracksman perched, Tom was aware that the door below had opened and Helen Mercer had disappeared. The rotting veranda stretched before them, piled high with many years' accumulation of fallen leaves. Tom was grateful for the drenching fog which had made them sodden. On a clear dry night they would have rustled and crackled like so much tissue-paper under their feet.

A row of shuttered windows stared back sullenly at them, mute testimony of the old hospitable days when each had sheltered a guest and the house had been the center of social life for the surrounding ranchos. very veranda slouched in a furtive way like a spineless fellow who resents the memories of more respectable times; but however rotten the floor, the honest beams held true. Beneath their cautious feet no warning creak complained of their weight.

HONEST BILL'S figure had a brief moment before merged into the dark background of the house and even as Tom tiptoed up he had noiselessly forced the shutters on one window and was busy with the old-fashioned lock on the sash. Hartshorn's little eyes were almost crossed in his acute enjoyment. To jimmy the very stronghold of his high-class competitors; to outwit them by the clumsy methods they despised—it was his idea of the most exquisite humor.

The long unused window started to protest audibly at this midnight disturbing of its slumber but after being soothed by a few drops from Honest Bill's oil-can it slid smoothly open and they slipped over the sill into the room beyond.

The two men melted away from the dangerous square of light and stood silently for a moment, listening. Apparently the whole upper floor was unused; at least that part which faced the outside of the house. It was as Helen had guessed, only the heart of the building was used in order to keep up, to the passer-by, the camouflage of its one isolated tenant.

They felt their way noiselessly around the dark room to where instinct told them a door should let on the upper hall. The room was semi-furnished in the style of the '60's. A walnut highboy, bare of any trinkets caught Tom a nasty crack on the knee and a dark mass in one corner, perilously like an unusually tall man, sent his hand jerking back to his hip-pocket until his straining eyes told him that it was only a roll of carpet propped against the wall.

Then came the soft scraping of a key in a long-unturned lock and the young fellow caught his breath nervously as he stepped into the hall beside the cracksman. The blood was tearing through his veins at an alarming rate. He had the curious sense of being a spectator instead of an actor in this mad scheme he had staged, of watching the body of Tom Fleming steal and swagger his way through an impossible novel instead of a situation of real life. He wondered if Helen had this same oddly detached feeling. The thought of her steadied him and made him realize the gravity of it all. For Helen's sake as well as their own they must find the emeralds and get away quickly.

"Hurry—hurry." He found himself breathing it impatiently to the dark figure beside him.

Honest Bill nodded offendedly. What did he mean—"Hurry!" Did this guy think he was stopping to drink a cup of tea?

The steep bare stairs quaked once as they cautiously felt their way by the old-fashioned banister and Tom's heart quaked in sympathy. Followed a hair-whitening period when both flattened themselves to the wall and their hands crept to the comforting bulge of the automatics in their pockets.

Two—three minutes passed. The darknesss was unshattered by any warning burst of light. In the room—evidently the kitchen at the end of the hall—they could hear the Portuguese moving about on the bare floor. A subdued sound of voices came from one of the center rooms—evidently beyond those cracked and stained white plaster walls was the Eastern luxury Helen had described.

Again a start was made and they finally stood, unmolested in the lower hall. The voices were louder now. Once Tom was sure he heard the girl's clear treble, followed by a smothered burst of appreciative laughter. His heart swelled with both pride and fear. The little brick—she was playing up to her part.

Only for a moment they hesitated—that lower hall was too dangerous. At any moment the kitchen door might be opened, exposing them to the view of the Portuguese "watch."

One, two, three—the girl had said the third door from the front of the house led to the room containing the safe. Tom gently tried the knob and it turned in his hand. The room was not even locked.

A sudden realization of the terrible power Cleete must have over those clever crooks to leave this valuable place unprotected, smote Tom anew and caused him to break out in a gentle but profuse perspiration. He was dimly aware that Honest Bill had drawn his gun and as he opened the door an infinitesimal crack he followed suit, almost prayerfully grateful for the comforting feel of the cold steel.

Luck played into their hands, this room was dark, its only light sifting in from the narrow opening between the velvet curtains which clothed a second entrance. Prepared as he was by Helen's recital, the barbaric loveliness of the room nearly carried away the young fellow's breath. It served to fill the cracksman with fresh resentment. This luxury was like flaunting the obsoleteness of his own methods in Honest Bill's face and in return he looked around for the safe vindictively.

Tom stole on tiptoe to the opening in the curtains and looked through.

He had always supposed the poet who described *Abou Ben Adhem's* room as being "rich and like a lily in bloom" was press-agenting at the time. Now the line instinctively floated into his head.

Beneath the mica shades of the seven suspended lamps, the room beyond appeared to glow and throb with color like the heart of a rich sapphire. Even Helen's half-awed description had not done it justice. The intense blue of the hanging, the rich background of the rugs fairly pulsed with the exquisite shade, yet so softly, so deeply that the eye was not offended but drank it in appreciatively.

Above, in glorious contrast, glowed the vases; the depthless carmine gleam of the pigeon-blood cloissonés, the strange rich tones of the others with their contrasting blacks and ivories and inimitable rare blues.

Merely to glimpse them was to understand in some slight degree the strange man whose passion they were. Crook he might be—driven by the insatiable lust of possession—but artist he certainly was. Then Tom's eyes fell on the group beyond and his fascinated admiration was wiped from his mind.

HELEN MERCER was enthroned in one of the ebony chairs whose somber black velvet outlined her dainty slimness with the clean-cut lines of a cameo. Her cheeks were high with color, even the pale gold hair about her face seemed vividly alive, her hands moved animatedly as she illustrated her tale to the little knot of men clustered about her. It was evident to the watchful young man behind the curtain that she was playing her part under a terrible tension.

A tall young man in evening clothes looked down, regarding her with such obvious admiration in his narrowed black eyes that Tom's fingers instinctively curled into fists. At that moment he hated Trevillion more cordially than all the rest of them put together.

The gay little ripple of the girl's conversation had caught even Cleete's interest. Tom recognized him at once from Helen's description. He was standing slightly apart, undeniably commonplace in appearance, appearing more like a divinity student than ever, his mild blue eyes twinkling appreciatively behind his thick glasses as the girl reached the point in her story and the little group of men broke into a soft roar.

Under cover of the next remark from Trevillion, the girl shot a quick glance toward the curtained doorway; a frightened, anguished attempt to pierce the narrow line of gloom in the center and discover if the two men had reached it yet.

The next minute she had flashed back a whimsical retort and the animated smile again played over her face.

If any impetus had been needed by Tom to hurry, that momentary dropping of the mask would have done it. His eyes were jerked to the cracksman motionless beside the safe except for his long twisting fingers which turned the combination with incessant patience, his ear flattened to the lock to catch the faint click of the mechanism as it fell in place.

A very agony of helpless impatience seized the young man at the sight of that crouching figure, apparently accomplishing nothing while the precious minutes went by and the girl played her dangerous game unaided in the room beyond. He plunged his twitching hands deep in the pockets of his coat, grateful when they found and closed about the handle of the automatic.

Now once again the romance of the thing had faded, leaving a terrible fear in its stead. He realized only too clearly the noose into which they had run their heads. They were as much alone in this isolated house as if they stood in the middle of the Mohave desert and the young man did not deceive himself as to their probable fate if this mad attempt should be discovered.

He checked an imploring whisper to the cracksman to work faster; for a wavering moment he even contemplated flight without the emeralds—anything to get the girl away from this house of fear. Then he gulped and took himself severely in hand; it would never do to have a fit of nerves now. He must play it as gamely as Helen was doing.

Again he turned back to the yellow slit in the curtains. The movement set them swaying ever so slightly and the single sharp glance the girl sent, under cover of a remark from the man called Clieve, showed that the girl had interpreted it correctly. Even at that distance Tom saw the color seep slowly from her face, then as slowly flood it again. He cast another glance behind him at that shadowy figure before the safe. The cracksman had seemingly not moved, his head was still flattened against the door, the fingers slowly turning — turning — apparently accomplishing nothing.

God—couldn't he hurry? Tom felt a hysterical desire to shriek aloud for haste. The next moment his forehead went cold and wet. Cleete had left the little group and was walking stright across the room toward him. For one terrible moment the young man stood spellbound, unable to speak or give warning to the unconscious cracksman behind him; hardly daring to believe that those enlarged blue eyes behind the thick lenses had not glimpsed him through the slit in the curtains. He was aware that Helen Mercer's stricken face had taken notice of Cleete's departure and his own anguished emotions seemed but a continuation of her own.

It was not until Cleete was half-way across the room that the spell was broken. Tom took two steps back to the kneeling figure.

"Quick—hide. Some one's coming——"

Even as he said it came a crash and a cry, loud and clear, to carry its message to him.

"Oh, Mr. Cleete—your vase—I dropped it, that splendid new vase you were showing me——"

Tom risked a second dash to the slit between the curtains. Helen's quick wit had saved them. A priceless cloisonné lay on the polished floor at her feet, its enamel chipped and loosened. Cleete, everything else wiped from his mind by this tragedy of one of his precious vases had turned his back upon the little room and was fairly racing back to the ruin she had wrought.

"Fine—oh, fine!" some one inside of Tom's body seemed to be applauding the girl's act; some one who appreciated the dramatic side of this breath-taking situation.

Then the cold-blooded critic was screamed down by the rest of his mind. Tom found himself towering over the crouching figure of the cracksman.

"Hurry—hurry—for God's sake—hurry," he was repeating it inanely, his finger-nails biting into the palms for emphasis.

The noise without had increased beyond its well-bred repression. Another voice—that of the Portuguese—could be heard raised apparently in protestation.

The cracksman suddenly straightened with a little gasp of triumph; the safe handle turned in his grip, the door swung open. Into the dark interior a flashlight gleamed for a breath's space; greenly and wickedly the twin emeralds seemed to leap at the intruders before Tom's fingers closed about them.

The flash winked out, the men flung themselves face about, their hands leaping to their pockets.

The curtains before the entrance were swaying, the yellow slit of light had disappeared. Some one had slipped into the room.

VIII

FOR a brief moment both men held their tense positions, revolvers drawn and pointed in the direction of the frightened breathing. Then a whisper came across the room.

"Tom—are you there?"

"Helen!" Tom's voice was husky.

A shadowy figure glided from its corner and ran lightly across the room to them.

"Quick—something's happened! We've got to go! Antonio—the Portuguese—came in and I'm afraid he's found me out. I didn't wait—I slipped in here—quick, out the window!"

As her words tumbled over each other in her panic she was steadily steering him to the further end of the room where a velvet hanging pushed aside revealed a bare, unfurnished room as poverty-stricken as the others which bordered the outside of the house. This was the room opening on to the shallow, front veranda, the room of the broken window pane. The girl was shaking with fright and excitement; the cold night air striking chilly on her arms and neck left bare by the little satin evening dress she wore.

"The window—quick, before they miss me!"

The cracksman was already tugging at the sash; hesitating to smash the glass and bring the whole pack about their ears. Above the rising excitement in the other room a voice was raised shrilly in anger—a girl's voice.

"What the devil does this mean? Why can't I come in?" The voice grew louder, evidently the owner had forced her way into the room. "I tell this—this idiot—" it was evidently the Portuguese who was thus flatteringly designated—"who I am and he says I'm already here!"

Here Cleete's soft voice cut in—gentle and chilly.

In reply the girl's angry voice rose louder.

"Who am I? I'm 'Blondie' Travers. What's this trash about me being down here the other night? I never was here before in my life; I've been two days trying to find this place from the infernal description Riddle gave me. Emeralds!" She laughed scornfully. "Fat chance I got at those emeralds! Oh, I was there all right—I lifted them, too.

"It was like taking gumdrops from the baby, but I couldn't get away quick enough. That fat woman discovered they were gone and before I could get through the beastly crush the entrances were guarded. They were starting to search people, too, and, believe me, I wasn't waiting for any aftermaths—I dropped them and beat it so they wouldn't be found near me.

"Oh, I had my credentials for being there. Riddle saw to that—but the confounded emeralds weren't found on the floor or any place else. They were gone—melted—vamoosed! It didn't dawn on me until tonight that they must have caught on some one's clothes and then I heard—oh, never mind how, you people here haven't a corner on all the information in the world—that I—that is, Blondie came down to this place with the Chetwynd emeralds. Somebody's been stringing you. Where is this other girl who's been pretending to be me?"

The rapid, high-pitched voice was interrupted by a crash. Tom, throwing caution to the winds with that last remark had snatched off his coat and wrapping it about his arm, swept the sash clean of glass, even as the sound of running footsteps sounded in the room beyond. Almost before his arm was drawn back, Honest Bill leaped through the empty frame with the agility of a cat. Tom lifted the girl, half-dead with fright, after him, and then swung himself over the sill on to the veranda.

He groaned aloud when he remembered that their machine was in the back, the lights turned out and the engine probably cold by now; a groan which changed to a grunt of relief. An automobile stood before the house, its headlights pointing back in the direction of the road; a car, whose excited driver had forgotten to turn the engine off.

The door of the house burst open behind them, even as he flung himself behind the wheel. A flash lit the black space and a bullet whined close by his head. Shouting to the other two to crouch upon the floor of the tonneau Tom lurched over the wheel and slammed the machine into gear. She started with a jerk and tore down the road, the long rows of trees flying on each side of him.

There was a maddening moment while they were forced to slack speed to work the mechanism of the gate, and in recognition of their disadvantage came another burst of flame and another bullet sang its deathly song near them. Trevillion's aim was getting too good. Regardless of the rough, unkept condition of the road, Tom reeled the speedometer up to fifty, keeping himself from being bounced from the seat by a savage grip on the wheel.

He could hear nothing for the whistling of the wind as they cut through, but it was just before they swung on to the smooth asphalt highway that a scream came from Helen—

"They're coming in our car!"

A third shot whizzed by.

The young fellow shut his teeth hard and pulled the wheel around, turning a corner at thirty an hour, thanking his stars for the nonskid tires. The fog had disappeared now; the stars were glittering coldly overhead. Watching his chance, when he dared, the young man reached down and switched off the tail-light, but the others had already sighted them and bore down at terrific speed.

A few late machines were passed, some at a narrow margin; one driver yelling angrily and swinging his car sharply into the dirt as they grazed his fender.

Evidently they were being taken for a joy party with more of a capacity for liquor than caution.

Helen was kneeling on the floor of the tonneau, her eyes glued to the lights of the oncoming machine, while she yelled their progress to Tom, having to put her face close to his shoulder to make her voice carry over the rushing of the wind. The other car, with Trevillion at the wheel and Cleete and the man Clieve in the back seat, bore down on them along the dark highway like some fire-spouting monster.

At San Bruno, another machine, bound in the same direction, loomed before them and Tom took a desperate chance. Reaching over, without slacking speed, he switched out his headlights, plunging the highway into thick blackness; then he flung the wheel violently over and swung into the lonely branch road leading up the peninsula. There was a chance that their pursuers would follow the other car up the highway, but this hope was shattered when, on the desolate wide salt marsh over which the road stretched, a fourth shot was fired, this time striking the ground close behind them. The marksman was attempting to blow out their rear tires.

Tom groaned. He had taken the worst possible course. At this time in the morning the San Bruno Road was practically deserted; only the sprawling little town of South City—dark at this hour—breaking the dreary landscape of salt marsh and barren hills. On the highway the crooks would not have dared to fire for fear of drawing undesired attention upon themselves. On this lonely road, the few people on the little dismal farms who might hear the shots would not be inclined to investigate.

A RAILROAD-CROSSING loomed ahead, and even as they came upon it the warning bell told of the train further down the track, its headlights already splitting the darkness. A quick hope rose in Tom's heart that the other machine would be halted by that long string of freight cars. He stepped hard on the throttle and the car bounded over the tracks, grazed by the descending gates.

A little cry was wrung from the girl, then came a groan from the cracksman and the other car suddenly appeared in the fierce headlight of the puffing engine, crashing through the gates as if they had been so much tissue paper, bits of broken glass and splinters of white wood dancing in the dazzling light of the lamps.

Now Tom hit it up until the speedometer reached the 60 mark. His arms ached with keeping the machine to the center of the road. His headlights were snapped on—at that speed he needed every caution. The car rocked and swayed with the bumps in the asphalt; the wind, even with the protection of the wind-shield, filling their nostrils and mouths as if with water, making them fight for each breath.

Another shot glanced off the ground behind them, then another. The car had started the climb of the hills now, the road lined on one side by cliffs, towering into barren peaks above; on the right a slope down to the dark waters of the back bay.

Around curves, Tom was forced to slack speed to a certain extent for the hills jutted in great raw walls about which he swept, cut-out open, siren shrieking madly. Then Helen made a discovery and yelled it to Tom. From their superior altitude she could see the pursuing car; catching glimpses as it rounded the curves after them—not more than this—a light was following them, coming with a speed which matched and surpassed either of the machines.

"Police," screamed Tom in explanation and stepped on the throttle harder.

Around curves he was fairly safe, the pursuers, uncomfortably close now, could not take good aim; but a long level stretch over the top of the grade appeared and in answer a rain of shot struck the ground behind them. The girl's scream seemed but an echo of the concussion of air and as if in continuation came an explosion twice as loud.

"They've got us!"

Tom felt a terrible tugging on his arms and realized with a sudden stab of fear that this time the marksman's aim was true. One of their rear tires had blown out. The car careened madly to the right and the young man threw all his strength to straightening the wheel. From right to left and back she swung; their rear wheels defining a perfect half-arc. Then he realized with a sick horror that the front wheels were hanging over space—seemed to hang there for a terrible eternity, then the car slowly toppled over and Tom's last conscious thought was a feeling of mild surprise that there was no echoing crash; nothing but a swimming blackness and an odd numbness in his arms—and oblivion.

Out of the blackness grew a star, an odd green star which slowly turned golden and whirled with frightful speed on one point. A deep voice somewhere was repeating, "making it rich and like a lily in bloom," which was so obviously ridiculous when taken in connection with everything else that his eyes fluttered open. For a moment his thoughts were entirely concerned with the other stars—there were millions of them, all crowding and elbowing each other for room in his bedroom ceiling.

Then he became slowly aware that he was wretchedly cold; that what should have been his bed was oddly hard and stony and that his bedroom ceiling was really the sky. After that memory rushed back. He was shaken, slightly nauseated, but miraculously alive. Close beside him, some one was crying softly and repeating his name. He made an effort to lurch upright, dimly conscious of a stabbing pain in his side; and found himself looking unsteadily into Helen Mercer's eyes. The girl's hair was tumbled over her shoulders in a pale gold mass; her eyes shone with tears in the starlight. Tom's eyes traveled jerkily down her little satin evening dress, literally torn to ribbons.

"You—you're hurt?" He asked it hoarsely.

She shook her head.

"It was the top—the top saved us, we turned over on our side but the top saved us from turning turtle. Oh, Tom—you aren't hurt—are you—are you——"

Her concern caused the young man to put his unsteady arms about her and draw her face feebly to his. It seemed the most natural thing in the world to do, and quite as simply the girl kissed him back.

It was a minute before he looked around. They seemed to be in a ditch—the machine, a wreck in the starlight, sprawled bulkily beside them. The other car had completely disappeared.

"Honest Bill!" Tom exploded it.

Helen looked at him with fear and remorse in her eyes. It was the first time they had either one thought of the cracksman. He might be pinned under the car, dying at this very moment.

"Tom, I never thought to look. I guess I fainted for a minute and when I came to, I was so worried about you. Oh, Tom—you look—I don't dare."

Bitterly reproachful at his selfish oversight, Tom dragged himself unsteadily to his feet and stumbled over to the toppled car. He might have saved himself the trouble.

Honest Bill was gone.

So were the emeralds.

"HEY! All right down there?" The up-flare of a flashlight slanted for a moment on the face of a motorcycle policeman rather ludicrously poked over the edge of the cliff, before it came to focus on their upturned heads.

"All right for a funeral," Tom croaked. That stabbing pain in his side again, hurting cruelly as he drew his breath.

The officer eased himself beside them; made sure that they were in no immediate danger of passing to the Happy Hunting Grounds, then looked grimly over the wrecked machine.

His wrath increased, as his anxiety for them subsided.

"This is no place, nor no time to start lecturing, but by way of a tip, the speed-limit on this road is thirty an hour, not sixty."

The girl burst out hysterically.

"But you don't understand—those others were right behind us——"

"Racing ain't no excuse." The officer said it more in weariness than in anger. "Your joy-riding pals got away—I let 'em go to come back and look for you when I saw you go over the bank."

"Got away—they got away!" Tom tottered a couple of steps in disappointed anger. "Those crooks got away——"

The sudden movement sent that shooting pain through his side again and he caught his breath with a stab. He saw Helen's anxious white face appear unaccountably above his own and became aware that the officer with sudden apprehension had leaped to his assistance. Again the familiar little green star began to burn in his brain.

"Oh, ——."

A voice, very weak and very far away, yet undisputably his own, said it calmly and deliberately. Then the whole world went out in a blinding flash of pain.

At half-past nine the next morning, Motorcycle Officer Bixbee walked into a ward of the San Mateo County Hospital with a curt but friendly nod to the golden-haired girl whose anxious eyes barely left the bandaged figure of the young man on the bed.

In answer to Tom's mute question, the officer shook his head disappointed.

"No use—I guess we lost out. Oh, not so far as the emeralds go," he amended quickly. "If, as you say, Honest Bill got away with 'em we'll get 'em back by night. The San Francisco police are already on his trail." There was contempt in the policeman's tone. "But it's the others—the club. Too bad you and the young lady wasn't in shape to tell us about 'em last night; we could have nabbed the whole bunch. My thinking they were a joy-riding party and you fainting just as you was going to tell about 'em threw me off the track.

"As soon as the young lady here recovered enough to tell Blake about it a bunch of us went down there. We found the house just as she said—Lord, some joint, wasn't it—but they was all gone—even the Bohunk. Left in quite some hurry from the looks of things; rugs in a heap; safe door swinging open and the safe itself as clean as a whistle. Not a scrap of paper left to give a clue neither. Found your car down there, she's some splashed with mud and the lamps are battered up, but that was the only thing they overlooked that wasn't nailed down."

For several minutes after the officer had left, Tom lay with closed eyes, motionless except for the rise and fall of the bedclothes over his chest.

The girl thought that he was sleeping and tiptoed gently from the room. But Tom's brain was doing double-quick time and his mental vision was not exactly reassuring. It had taken the form of a huge ledger, with these entries on the debit side:

> Two Broken Ribs.
> A Borrowed Machine, slightly banged up.
> One Suit of Clothes, simply nowhere.

And; vague, but grimly dominating the future:

> What were they going to say at the office?

The total was too staggering. Tom opened his eyes in self-defense and fixed them unblinkingly on the white plaster ceiling.

Then, out of his Pandora's Box of Troubles came this little ray of comfort. The kinetoscopic events of the past few days whirled colorfully through his brain. Once more his nerves thrilled to the gun-play as they plunged from the fatal "club house," to the terrible moments of the mad dash up the peninsula; once more he reached the acme of excitement as the machine hung for that eternity over the edge of the bank.

The unquenchable spark of the born adventurer gleamed in the young fellow's eyes and he broke into a grin.

"Anyway," he gloated within himself, "that was one time in my life when I was living in high gear!"

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

A FEW Camp-Fires ago Harrison R. Howard, of our writers' brigade, sent us a brief greeting as he took ship for France. Here is a word from him, now a sergeant in the ——— Engineers, written from the other side, with a couple of clauses clipped out by the censor:

> It's been a long trail since last I had opportunity of writing you, a trail fraught with excitement and bizarre pleasures. . . . But there's an exhilaration in it all, even the drudgery, that makes for enthusiasm and gets things done in super-American style.
>
> UNLESS one is among that chosen few who are said to "think internationally," as it were, it is impossible, back there in America, to realize the magnitude of this noiseless engine for general accomplishment, this American Expeditionary Force, which is working twenty-four hours a day "over here." To the neophyte, at his first glance to the white light, a breath-taker, as the West has it. Those magic letters—A. E. F.! They mean a world, a literal world, a buzzing hive of activity. But the censor commands that its song, in detail, must remain unsung—yet a while . . . to look into a Camp-Fire. Doubtless, things are going on as usual, back there in the States; but it's difficult to believe it from here. It seems that America must be in a feverish state of activity, so accustomed have we become to it over here.
>
> Taps is sounding, so I'll have to close this note.—H. R. Howard.

AT ONE of our Camp-Fires Edgar Young "started something" by asking "What is the spirit of adventure, particularly as considered biologically? Also, another of our comrades, Earl J. Teets, said he'd been knocking around a good deal but had never met adventure and is there any such animal? One of the replies—to both inquirers—is given below, from Charles Beadle, who, like Edgar Young, belongs to our writers' brigade:

> Grand Isle, La.
>
> My dear Camp-Fire:—The question that Edgar Young sets is most interesting. I should rather like to have a shot at it. Yet it is such a mighty big question to propound the definition of the spirit of adventure that I am going to hedge by, as politely as possible, inquiring what may be the spirits of love (sex attraction) and hunger? For does she not hunt with the same pack?
>
> BIOLOGICALLY, I should say, that adventure (not the magazine, with due respect!) is as important as her (I say her advisedly, because she is so entrancing to a male) two sisters in the evolution of man. The purpose of definition is best served perhaps, on the principle of a pound of fact is worth, etc., by a simile. It is easy to imagine that some primeval person of the crustacea family thoroughly enjoyed his meals whatever they were, also his mate whoever she was. Is it inconceivable that the sand crab owed its existence to that very spirit of adventure worrying innumerable ancestors into finding out what was going on in that interesting land, the beach, and in another element, air?
>
> "There's something lost behind the sand-dunes!
> Go and find it!"
>
> sang the crustacean Kipling. Get me?
>
> As for the second regarding intellectual adventure, is not this question answered by Edgar Young? The impulse which prompted him to ask the question is the lady herself!
>
> AS FOR Earl J. Teets I would say, in all comradeship, that I suspect that he has sailed in consort with *U. S. S. Adventure* many a time and oft, but that he has mislaid his signal-book. Has he never for example, felt a thrill during "line of battle"—even at maneuvres? If so, let him know that that was a promise of the kisses to come. And for a recipe let him take, when he be free, this recipe, which, like the patent medicine "unsolicited testimonials," I may recommend from personal experience: Take one map of the world; and with eyes blindfolded stab seven times, note countries pierced; take a coin and toss and reduce same to one: GO to that One. Never mind how, but go. If he doesn't find adventure, the Lord help him, I can not!—Charles Beadle.

WHEN he wrote the story and the brief letter in January, our comrade, W. Townend, was stationed at Queenstown, Ireland, a lieutenant in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. In May, when I write this, he may be one of those meeting the big Hun offensive. In August, when you read this, I hope that the German offensive power may be broken and that at least the beginning of their end may have dawned. It may take years, but at least we can hope that months or weeks will do it. However long it takes, I hope no soft, temporizing peace will be made until the Hun's fangs have been pulled and he ceases to be a menace to democracy, freedom and real peace. And I'm wondering what the coming struggle has in store for Townend, who gives us this story. Good luck to him and God bless him, and all the others who are fighting the good fight. Here is his word about the story:

> Spike Island, Queenstown, Ireland.
> January 12, 1918.
>
> The main facts are accurately stated—that is, the dugout, the blocking of the doorway, shell-shock and the trench rats. I can assure you I hated the rats in France as much as I ever hated anything. —W. Townend.

ALL American citizens are drawn from two sources—children and immigrants. If you want clear water in a barrel there isn't much use in trying anything else until you've stopped or clarified any streams of dirty water that may be flowing into the barrel. To put the matter baldly, both the streams that fill the barrel of American citizenship are pretty muddy. There is no sense in blaming the streams for being dirty. It is *our* job to keep them clean.

What do we do to keep these two streams clean, to ensure good American citizens instead of bad? What have *you* ever done toward it?

THE American League for Citizenship has been incorporated to afford the means of united effort toward this end, to install the teaching of real citizenship in all our schools and to limit immigration to what we can really absorb and to what will not merely pollute the water in our barrel.

HERE is a letter from Stephen Chalmers, comrade of our writers' brigade. The following I pumped out of him in the course of a long conversation on immigration and citizenship in general. He was a British subject, a Scotchman. Even though he had lived in this country quite a number of years, he would not ask for American citizenship until he felt he had been here long enough to be really assimilated, sufficiently understanding of American ideals to be a really worthy citizen of the country to which he intended to transfer his allegiance. Do you get the full force of it? This immigrant would not accept American citizenship until he felt *he* was worthy of *it!* Our laws giving citizenship to many who are *not* worthy of it, this immigrant takes the responsibility and the ideals into his own hands and makes sure that in at least one case the United States of America does not get a citizen who is unworthy.

THAT is very splendid. But doesn't it make you, one of those who determine our laws and policies, rather ashamed that the vote of this clean American citizen, or of a native-born American, is nullified by the vote of some unworthy immigrant who should never have been given citizenship? Say, for example, some German who has since been using his American citizenship as a means of hurting America and helping her enemy, Germany, the perjury of his broken oath of allegiance to us not even being punished, his American citizenship not even taken from him.

Who determines whether such things shall be? The politicians? *No!* You and I and the rest of the hundred million Americans who hold the fundamental power *always*. The politicians can do only what we let them do. You can argue a thousand years but you can never shake that fact. You can fail to use your share of the fundamental control, you can dodge your duty and be a dead weight and parasite, but you can never free yourself of the responsibility.

If our immigration laws are faulty, if some of our immigrants pollute the water in our barrel, *you* are one of those who are to blame.

THERE are many remedies that might be applied. Mr. Chalmers' letter sets forth one of them that merits your serious consideration—if you are a real American, a real believer in democracy, not a parasite, a shirker, or something worse.

> Saranac Lake, N. Y., March 1, 1918.
>
> . . . You know my feeling in this matter. I object to the walk-up of illiterate citizens who get first papers without a deep realization of what they are doing. During the next five years their environment is not always conducive to proper thinking and when they get second papers they are too often under the influence of this environment and are worse than no citizens at all.
>
> I would like to see the law changed to at least two years before *any* concession is granted, and then only under the strictest examination as to integrity, intelligence, understanding of citizenship, record in the interval (to be supplied by pastor, rabbi, district police—what you please). In short, even as somebody or other served seven years for Ruth—and then some—make prospective would-be citizens regard citizenship *as a prize to be won and worth winning!*

Every vote of a bad citizen is destructive of the vote of a good citizen, and surely the American born is entitled to have his franchise protected against the influenced vote of the illiterate.—Stephen Chalmers.

IN CONNECTION with his story in this issue Hugh Pendexter gives us a little historical "dope":

Norway, Maine.

I have taken St. Clair's (spelled Sainclair in the old ballads) defeat and Wayne's victory over the Northwestern Confederacy for the background of this yarn. The invitation to war was given by red belts, strings and red sticks, the latter commonly being used by the Creeks and their cousins the Seminoles, and radiating from them up the Mississippi valley.

A Hidatsa Indian, living in Dakota in 1865, was held by the Indians to be a mighty magician because of his trick of producing red, ripe cherries from his mouth at any season. It is supposed he preserved them in whisky. He was known as "Cherry-in-the-Mouth." As it's never to my knowledge been played up in fiction I have transposed the trick back to 1791 for a white man to play.

Little Turtle's speech, "I am the last, etc." is a matter of history.

I HAVE shown that Bund was ransomed without narrating in detail the fact. The Indian and historical dope is O.K. Papakeecha, *alias* Flat Belly, lived and had his being. I have tried within the limited scope of the short story to sketch the horror caused by St. Clair's defeat, and the terrible possibilities for lonely cabin or settlement anywhere north of the Ohio. The Indians' turning back with their white prisoner instead of pressing on to the Ohio is true to life, as their service was purely voluntary and they could quit at any time without losing caste or inviting punishment.—Hugh Pendexter.

ONE of the few unwritten laws of our Camp-Fire is that, when it comes to printing, we devitalize cuss-words by using dashes to indicate them, and the same rule holds in our fiction stories. But perhaps some of you noticed that in a recent serial, "For the Flag," we let one cuss-word go as it lay. The following letter to me from the author explains the exception:

Richmond, Va.

I want to ask, while I think of it, one special favor regarding the story.

In chapter 26 *Billy Smith*, in speaking to the German minister of the Kaiser, says: "To hell with him and all his brood!"

Now *Billy* means this with all his heart when he says it. He doesn't mean "To —— with him;" he means "To HELL with" the murdering scoundrel. I myself meant it when I wrote it, and I'm sure that it echoes your personal sentiments. So I beg of you —please—to let the word stand when the story goes to print, and thereby bring mild comfort to the souls of the men who read it, and who in concert with you and me could voice what they feel in far stronger terms if it were permissible to put them in type.

I understand why, as a rule, you don't let down the bars to maledictory expressions in *Adventure*, but here's a case when the exception cries aloud for admission, and with a world-wide reason to stand upon.—Thomas Addison.

I don't believe you'll blame me for making an exception of this case, though even where the full strength of the cussing is so strongly called for we can't keep up this exception business. For example, personally I have no brief for the Kaiser, unless it is that maybe he's insane or the helpless tool of still worse men. I can, in his case, get along with nothing more than dashes. But when it comes to Ludendorff, the Crown Prince, Hindenburg and Tirpitz it strains me a bit to be limited by dashes. If Mr. Addison can fill 'em in for the Kaiser, why shouldn't I be granted exceptions in these other cases? So there it goes. Mr. Addison's exception mustn't be considered a precedent or all the rest of us will be claiming equal privilege.

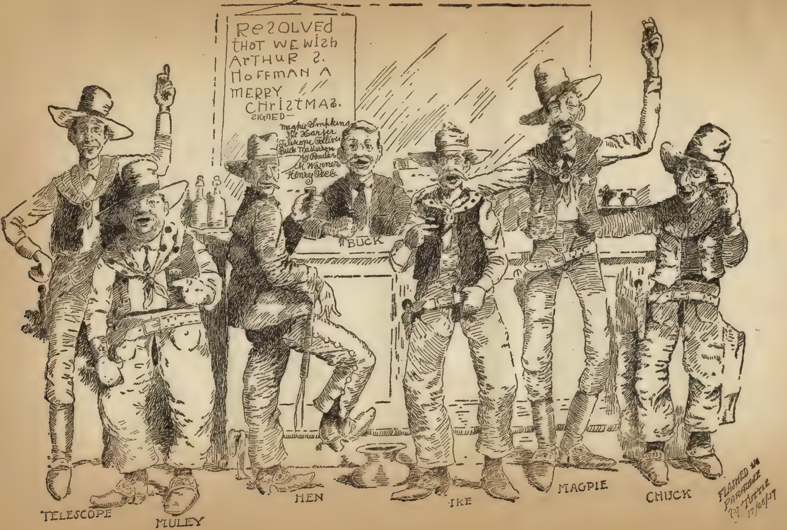
IF YOUR magazine is late in reaching you, please allow for present unsettled transportation conditions before hopping on to us. Because of war conditions we're starting the magazine out a week or ten days earlier then formerly, but troops, ammunition and supplies rightfully take precedence over magazines and the general routine of shipping is necessarily disturbed in many ways.

ON THE opposite page are some old friends of ours. W. C. Tuttle, who introduced us to *Ike*, *Magpie* and the rest of their bunch, used to be a cartoonist on a Spokane daily. Last Christmas, through his kind offices, I received a snap-shot of *Magpie et al* by way of greeting. Along with my thanks I ventured a regret that *Half-Mile Smith* and *Dirty-Shirt Jones* had so conspicuously slighted me and later was delighted to receive, *via* Mr. Tuttle's pen, a photo from Piperock's leading photographer. It appears on page 184 and bore on its back this legend:

DIRTY-SHIRT JONES (standing) and HALF-MILE SMITH.

Being as they were not in Xmas group, they willingly posed for this photo. They both send regards. The negative was retouched a little too much but otherwise it is good.

I thought you might like to see just what these old friends look like.


RESOLVED
THAT WE WISH
ARTHUR S.
HOFFMAN A
MERRY
CHRISTMAS.
SIGNED—
Magpie Simpkins
Ike Harper
Telescope Tolliver
Buck Masterson
Hen Boules
Chuck Warner
Henry Peck
BUCK
TELESCOPE
MULEY
HEN
IKE
MAGPIE
CHUCK
FLASHED IN PARADISE
W.J. TUTTLE 12/25/17

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Gladys E. Johnson, on the occasion of her first story in our magazine, rises and introduces herself to us, getting, I know, the friendly welcome we always have for the few women who gain membership in our writers' brigade:

It's a handicap, being a woman. That highly original remark is called into being by my nosing this little biography of mine in among the Indian fighters, the explorers and the "knights of empire" generally, whose histories go to make up the Camp-Fire.

THRILLING adventures have a way of sidestepping the female of the species, as a usual thing. It's most discouraging; all my life I have been trying to put myself in the way of thrillers only to have them jump clear over my head or burst into nothing at the most intense moment. But in spite of my efforts, the only thrilling adventure which has happened to me in the last two years was turning an automobile, containing five people, on its side, while driving at forty-seven miles an hour. Even here my diabolical good luck stayed with me, for, miraculous as it sounds, no one was even mussed up. But at that, my passengers on that occasion unanimously agreed that it was adventure enough for them.

Since then, though most of my spasmodic vacations have been spent in the mountains trying to trap adventures—and the mountains of California can be pretty wild—so far, the cougars and grizzlies have been gentlemen enough to overlook me.

I HAD the same good misfortune as a child. You'd think that a childhood spent largely in logging-camps could boast some dramatic moments, but all I brought away was an unsatisfied longing for excitement and a never-forgotten picture of that beautiful, wild California background.

I have found the dwelling-place of adventure many times, shortly after it moved out. Last Summer I trailed it, by the aid of gasoline, through this State down into Mexico. At a bull-fight in that country I almost caught up with it, but after the one dramatic moment, occasioned by the "toro" nearly hooking a matador, the bull-fight simmered down to a rather tame affair—and I'm not bloodthirsty either, as evidenced by my nearly turning the car over a second time to avoid a ground squirrel on the road through the Mojave Desert.

THERE was only one time when I was living on all six cylinders and having the thrills of my own heroes. This was three years ago when I was working on a San Francisco newspaper. Having too little patience and too much sense of the ridiculous, I graduated from "sob-sister" on the paper to a sort of female trouble-hunter. The paper embarked on several reform campaigns; the most exciting being an exposé of the fake fortune-tellers and clairvoyants in this city. As I was playing detective for the paper in an effort to obtain proof of their "bunco" methods, I, for once, had my fill of thrills, especially when I was trailed and eventually confronted with my real identity in a clairvoyant's office. For a moment I expected to have to do the movie stunt of kicking the window out and jumping on to an electric sign a story below, for I was pretty unpopular in that office right then. Afterward, I laughed to remember that in the excitement of the moment I thought with true stage newspaper loyalty, "Anyway, it'll look fine in the evening editions." Then once more Fate backed down and I was allowed to walk out of the door like any other mortal.

THE newspaper work was the best sort of training for the fiction writing, which I immediately afterward took up. I haunted the police-courts and the waterfront and came in contact with some curious and rather gruesome characters. Many an idea for a story was born while I listened to the strange result of tracing down a news story to make a "feature" out of it or stumbled over some novel and haunting situation which had no news value.

A year of reporting and I took the jump—left the paper and launched into the fiction game and now I am putting my "heroes" through some of the strange experiences I have heard, and introducing into my stories some of the queer people I have met.

AFTER all, it's pretty much of an adventure just living in San Francisco. It's the "story-book city," with its Chinatown, its queer, sordid Greek quarter, its waterfront, whose habitués are recruited from the Seven Seas, its Barbary Coast and its Kearney Street—the Rialto of the Adventurers, Will Irwin calls it.

And, Gelett Burgess says that anything can happen in San Francisco, so, who knows, maybe I will still bump into my hair-raising adventure!—
GLADYS E. JOHNSON.

A LETTER, written some time ago, from one of our comrades who is finding army life good for more than preparation for fighting:

LINE 82, SECTION E, KELLY FIELD, NO. 1, TEXAS
March 31, 1918.

Have been transferred from the Medical Department to the Aviation Corps. The rumor had it that the Detachment at the Base Hospital was to remain until the end of the war, and I got busy right away, applied for a transfer and through special recommendation from my colonel received same in six days.

I FIND —— hot and desolate in a way, but we sure do not get a whole lot of time to worry. The thing that seems to worry the boys here is that they can't get to France quick enough. And I cheerfully second the motion.

Do I like the life in the Army? You bet I do. It has done me a whole lot of good. In civilian life you may be able to stay up nights and have a good time and all that, but I prefer this. There is nothing like getting up early in the morning, feeling real good. It is the best and strictest school in the world, this army of ours, and with the material we have on hand and with the training they get, to tell the truth I can't see how the Kaiser is going to win this war.

I am expecting to be sent across in a very short time. Trade tested for the Camouflage Section and passed the test. So I am expecting to get a pretty close view of the Huns.—CARL G. LINDHULT.

WHEN Frank H. Huston talks about Indians he knows what he's talking about. Here's a letter to us from him which "Uncle Frank" labels as follows: "On Roping the Legs and Other Maunders."

All squaws amongst the plains Indians, who considered virtue as an essential jewel, "roped" themselves. The manner varied according to individual taste and the necessities of the moment. At times a thong at ankles or knees allowing them to shuffle along and at others an elaborate arrangement from ankles to waist with variations. An analogy may be seen with the Oriental custom of spiked belts and padlock with this difference; the squaws roped for self-protection, as the penalty for violation of a roped squaw was death. No woman old or young would leave the teepee without roping. Should they do so it would be advertising that they were common property, and a husband, brother, father or son would stand by and see them used like soiled doves without redress.

IT SHOULD be understood that the teepee and all pertaining to it, even the *travois* and ponies of burden were the property of the squaws; all the buck owned was his war-ponies, clothes and weapons of war and chase. In the home the woman was superior and could throw out the buck, even a big chief, and chuck his possessions at his head, as was occasionally done, not, however, if the buck was a good provider. As a protection against abuse the squaw could and did, even before her buck's eyes, propose that some other buck make up her dowry and take her as his squaw.

WHAT the whites called buying a wife was really a form of the European dowry. In some tribes a suitor would tie his pony near his adored's teepee; if she fed and watered it it was equivalent to saying yes. In others he left game at the entrance of the teepee; if she took it in and cooked it he was accepted. In others he made a rude reed whistle and at dusk would tootle for his charmer. If she, like Barkis, was willing, she would steal out, roped however, squat alongside him and with a blanket wrapped around them pulled over their heads they would sit for hours in seeming silence.

Sometimes a dozen flutes would be going at once, but no maiden ever seemed to mistake the wrong buck. I once heard the squaw of a poor hunter telling a buck in front of her husband that she liked him better than she did her own man and for him to give her man the amount of her dowry and she would move to his teepee, while all the while her buck sat with passive face taking it as a matter of course, which it really was.

THE whites introduced buying of wives, but for a long time the Indians thought they were only complying with Indian customs and were sore when the whites would go away and leave their squaws and progeny for the tribe to support.

Love in its highest sense appeared to be unknown; the relations were purely sexual and the whole thing to the acute observer appeared like a partnership. His duties were to protect, obtain game and skins, and to war; hers to prepare food, cloth, house and bedding from the skins he obtained and to do what slight tillage was done, to furnish wood and water—everything, in fact, that would leave the buck liberty to perform his duties, and each was proud and jealous of his or her prerogatives, these being sharply defined. Both squaws and bucks despised the whites because the latter did work pertaining to squaws and therefore seemed to lose caste, as one might say.

THE dog-soldiers were a sort of police, at times under direction of the elders, but having a close relation to the medicine-men who also directed them at times. They appeared to be a sort of militant neophyte, if one may use that term, and were executioners, preservers of law and order, and had various other duties.

The Dakotoh being of the Algonquin stock (original habitat New York and Pennsylvania, driven out by the Iroquois Confederacy), carried with them many of the customs of their original locality. One may see the analogy between the dog-soldiers and the Eries (cats) of the Six Nations, but the Eries were more strictly of the medicine ilk than the dog-soldiers.

A buck could take a scalp, make a coup, steal a horse, kill a grizzly and get his feather, but to reach the full rank of brave he must undergo the ordeal of the Sun Dance, which, if he passed satisfactorily, gave him his three feathers, marriage, the seat in council and the right to form a band of his own and be a chief if he could.

A STRONG high post was planted with thongs depending from the top like a May-pole. Certain preliminaries being complied with, the medicine-men slid a sharp knife under the breast muscles and a skewer, being passed through, was attached to the thongs. The candidate then danced and threw himself backward, the object being to tear or burst the flesh and muscles and thus free him. Cut the flesh one could not; it must be torn by your own exertions, and if one fainted or succumbed otherwise to the agony, he was released, dressed as, and took his place amongst the squaws. Buffalo skulls on thongs were sometimes similarly attached to the muscles at the shoulder-blades and the embryo brave danced around, dragging them after him, until the tortured flesh ruptured and released him. Some took on both at once front and rear. It was advisable to placate the medicine-man in Tammany fashion in order that he should not make the slit too close to the bones but shallow so that by strong exertions the flesh could be torn in a few hours or a day at most.

THE wounds left horrible scars, as any old-timer can testify. Rain-in-the-Face incurred the enmity of the conjurer who "slit" him and the latter ran his knife close to the bone and made a very long slit, front and back. Old Rain, however, managed in three days to burst the last and gained a wonderful renown. Rain was *not* a chief, but had the standing of one through his famous feat of endurance and also his ability. He told Tom Custer he would take his (Custer's) heart out and eat it, which he did later, and young Standing Horse, for one, never blamed him for so doing. But Rain, like Bull himself, had no use for *any* white. Two wise, very wise, and far-seeing men.

The "noblest Roman" was, of course, Red Cloud, but he antedates the former twain. Red was never whipped but once and then quit for good and gave his voice for peace always. The spirit was willing but he saw the futility of further hostilities and bowed to the inevitable. Will some millionaire erect a statue of him? The Lee of the Sioux.

When George Custer busted Black Kettle's band in Winter many Indians froze to death during the "session" having run into the brush stark naked from their beds with only their weapons.

THERE were so many delicate shades in Indian custom that no outsider ever mastered them all as did those to the manner or manor born. Frank Gruard, perhaps, excepted. I wish I could remember the buffalo hunt, the watchers, the procession to the first killed, the pipe-bearer carrying the uncased pipe on extended palms to the carcass and the pipe's return in its case; the ritual on starting, at the carcass, and the word given and the hunters darting forward; the partition of the carcass according to ritual, and the squaws and dogs and pickaninnies following to skin and carve the meat. And the good feast afterward—hump, marrow, tongue, milk-guts, suet and, as a *bonne bouche*, an unborn calf boiled in a paunch with its contents. Everybody's face, hands, arms and front bloody and greasy, but all happy. And later the squaws pounding the dried meat and suet to powder and stuffing it into skin and gut casings like Brobdingnagian sausage; the pemmican that beat any soldier's emergency ration ever contrived; good cold and raw or cooled and hot, strong meat for a strong people.

BUFFALO by thousands here in the hills; elk, deer, black and white tail antelope; prairie chicks; underfoot, camas for the digging; fish in the streams; no game laws or wardens; a blanket or buffalo robe, bag of salt, and gun, flint and steel and "Paradise enow." All gone past, as though it never existed! In its place a bread-card, the factory whistle, the big bell at the home ranch, a dad-blasted Bostonese with his imitation English accent or a hunk or dago or wap with a stinking devil-wagon. Cheyenne "Ki ye yi yuii!!!" silence. "Hy yoh hy yah hyyyy!"—*Finis*—Uncle Frank.

A LETTER written some months ago from a Canadian comrade doing war duty off the Atlantic coast, a man who was among the salvagers after the Halifax disaster:

> C. D. 13, care H. M. C. S. ——.
>
> This life is dreary and montonous, drifting around day and night in a ninety-foot boat. Overcast skies, gray-green waves, all add to the dreariness at this time of the year and ice-covered decks make life miserable. And oh joy! when your shift is done, down to the eight-by-twelve cabin and, hugging the oil-heater and sprawled out in as comfortable a position as you can possibly get, you grab your old favorite magazine and follow the adventures of some unfortunate cuss toiling through death and gore and hairbreadth escapes!
>
> Our boat is number thirteen and has thirteen of a crew, and our little Hotchkis six-pounder is number thirteen! So hooray for the hoodoo!—W. McKenzie Haines.

AS TO the copy of our magazine that has had more adventures than any other copy. That's a hard matter on which to get full data, but it is certainly interesting to record the reports as they come in from time to time:

> The first *Adventure* I read I found in an old hut not far from Mexico City. That was early in 1915. I also found one that I had read in an old mine-shaft in West Virginia. On the inside I found these words in pencil, "Barney Mack carried this book from China to Frisco, then here." A rather long trip if it's true.—Roy J. Williams.

WHAT about conditions in this country after the war? There will be big changes and there's already discussion of various problems. Good. But why talk about doing this and that if we're not fit to do them? It is merely building on sand to attempt betterments if we ourselves, through whom they must be put into practise, are not sound and trustworthy. No -ism or -ology or concrete improvement ever suggested can withstand the dry-rot of bad citizenship, of *our* bad citizenship. Why not begin at the foundation?—Arthur Sullivant Hoffman.

ADVENTURE'S FREE SERVICES AND ADDRESSES

These services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

Will give twenty-five cents apiece for copies containing my stories—"*The Greenstone Mask*," "*Gold Lust*," and "*The Island of the Dead*." Write and I will send money and necessary postage.

Address—J. ALLAN DUNN, care of *Adventure*.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp, at the Front or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

PILOT MALCOLM HYATT, No. 153829, care of Royal Air Force, 93 King Street, East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

CANSTEN B. HANSEN, U. S. N. Aviation Forces Le Croisie, care of Postmaster, New York, Foreign Service.

C. F. TESKE, U. S. S. *Arkansas*, care of Postmaster, New York.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 731 Guardian Building, Cleveland, O., in charge of preliminary organizing.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each month in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable and standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. Brintnall, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
Captain A. E. Dingle, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
Raymond S. Spears, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
Hapsburg Liebe, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and
Mexico Part 1
J. W. Robertson, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. Whiteaker, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
Robert E. Pinkerton, 5036 Utica Ave., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
George L. Catton, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
Ed. L. Carson, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
Theodore S. Solomons, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing,

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Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
Edgar Young, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
Gordon McCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
Robert Welles Ritchie, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
Captain A. M. Lochwitzky (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
Thomas S. Miller, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
George E. Holt, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada, Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
Charles Beadle, Care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
Albert Goldie, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following Ask Adventure editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

The Sargasso Sea

Question:—"How large is the Sargasso Sea? Just where is it located? Is there good foundation for the stories of fabulous treasure to be found there? Has any one successfully navigated this sea or salvaged treasure from it?"—Thos. Mahoney, A. E. F., France.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—Your inquiry regarding the Sargasso Sea has been referred to me, and replying I can assure you that all the tales told of this part of the ocean are as imaginary as any tale of a trip to the Moon or Mars. Actually the Sargasso Sea is contained between latitudes 20° and 35° North, and longitudes 40° and about 70° West, and is simply a vast area of slowly circling waters formed by the influence of various great ocean streams.

Naturally this slow revolving motion has, in the centuries, collected a mass of weed and other floating material; sometimes one may see tree-trunks, masts, and bits of wreckage; but the area is in no place dense enough to impede navigation, unless in the case of a sailing ship becalmed, but a wind strong enough to move her in clear water will drive her through the Sargasso Sea with trifling impediment of speed. In fact, as for navigation, numberless lines of ships pass through it every voyage; and if any fabulous wealth lies in that part of the ocean at all it most certainly lies at the bottom.

You may easily imagine that old-time sailors, with their knack of creating Flying Dutchmen, Phantom Ships, and other weird things, seeing perhaps a derelict among all the floating weed—which derelict might easily have been found outside the weedy area—invented a tale of Spanish galleons eternally revolving in this mysterious maze in mid-ocean, laden with fabulous treasure doomed never to sink.

Finally I will say that while of course the thickness of this weed-strewn sea varies according to the lately prevailing winds, I have passed through it many, many times and have never seen it in such a condition that a boat could not be rowed through it.

Diseases of East Central Africa

Question:—"I have knocked about considerably in various countries and it has long been my desire to visit the "Dark Continent." I have roughed it a great deal, am a good shot, etc., etc.

(1) "What are health conditions around and between Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria? That is, is it a healthy region?

(2) From an African point of view is it heavily forested?

(3) Is game more or less abundant there than in other parts of the interior? Especially large game, *i. e.*, of cat and herb-eating species?

(4) Can one live off the country outside medicinal and other necessities not furnished by nature?"—W. E. C., Belmore, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—(1) Health conditions between Lakes Tanganyika and Victoria are fairly bad. Malaria, spirulam, black water, and sleeping sickness are the principal diseases. In case you are not familiar with these I will explain briefly, taking it for granted that you know what malaria is.

Spirulam is given to man by the bite of a tick and produces a fever very like malaria, but quinin has no effect; it lasts some time and knocks you out, leaving the patient usually very weak, but never have I heard of it being fatal.

Black water is violent inflammation of the kidneys (it is a matter of dispute whether black water is the result of excessive malaria or not) resulting in the urination of blood (hence the name). Very often fatal as the patient dies of heart failure. Medicines are calomel and purge thoroughly (stop quinin), and as much champagne and brandy as the patient will take with the object of keeping up the heart's action, on which everything depends. If you get black water once and get over it my advice is to clear out of the country.

Sleeping sickness is given by the bite of the tsetse fly (rather like a horse-fly with the wings crossed). First produces a slight fever, headaches, etc., and perhaps vomiting, afterward affects the nervous system with the result that patient becomes restless, irritable and indifferent by turns until finally he lapses into a coma—sleep—attendant with anemia and a general wasting away. There is no cure yet discovered. The percentage of these flies with the germ in them ready for business is reckoned to be about two per cent.

But still don't run away with the idea that the country is fatal. I've lived there and the only thing I collected was malaria and not much of that.

(2) From a general African point of view it is fairly wooded. That is compared to the Congo forests the forest there is slight and variable. There are uplands with open rolling country and scrub.

(3) Game (large) is fairly abundant but varies greatly. Stretches without game at all and in other parts extremely thick—of both sorts.

(4) No, you cannot reckon on living off the country. Chickens, eggs, and sometimes goats and milk are obtainable at villages by trading—if the natives happen to be friendly and they usually are if you know the way to go about it. Game is too erratic to rely upon. One week you may have enough to feed a caravan to gorging and the next not enough for a dog, and as for said villages there are large tracts uninhabited. Sometimes you can get sweet potatoes, but rarely in my experience. And Nature's supply of food for man, white men particularly, is conspicuous by its absence in most of Africa.

Outdoor Work in Maine

Question:—"I am a young man of seventeen years of age desirous of getting work on a farm or in a lumber camp, in fact, anywhere where I can live and work in the open. I am six feet tall, weigh 163 pounds and am very strong and healthy. If you can assist me by helping me to get work in your territory I will be very grateful to you."—ALEXANDER EISER, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Dr. Hathorne:—There is plenty of work to be had on the farms in Maine at the present time, and as the season advances help will be very scarce, from all indications. There is a great demand for farm help in Aroostook County in the northern part of the State. This is a great farming country and the season of 1916 the farmers raised over 16,500,000 bushels of potatoes. The draft has taken many of the young men and the farmers will have to depend on help either over or under the draft age.

The Aroostook Chamber of Commerce is making efforts at the present to get volunteers to go there and work on the farms.

The pay will be good and pleasant homes to live in. If I were you I would write direct to them at Houlton, Maine, and they will write what the wages will be and other particulars.

There are also many farmers in the vicinity of Bangor that are in need of competent help.

Authority on South Sea Islands

MR. TOM L. MILLS writes: In a third communication I have received from Mr. A. E. B. Baker, a most grateful Ask Adventurer who is serving on the China Naval Station, he says:

> "I have just read a book, 'In Strange South Seas,' by Miss Grimshaw. It is packed full of description and information, but how far reliable, of course, I am not competent to say; but it sounds to me the right dope all right."

It has occurred to me to make a special note on this Bakerism, for the guidance of the many Ask Adventurers (I have had forty-five queries to answer up to date). Miss Beatrice Grimshaw is an English journalist who came out to investigate the South Sea Islands. They got her. She is enamoured of them—and she now packs on-the-spot facts into most attractive fiction. She makes Sydney her headquarters, and no woman has wandered the South Seas to the extent of Beatrice Grimshaw, who has even dared the interior of Papuas, the awful *Terra Incog.* The late Louis Becke for South Sea Island conditions of twenty years ago, and Ralph Stock and Beatrice Grimshaw as moderns, are good authorities.

EDITOR'S NOTE:—"Nobody's Island," by Miss Grimshaw, appeared in *Adventure* for February, 1917.

Dog Travel in Alaska

Question:—"Could you tell me the difference between Eskimo dogs, huskies, and malamutes?

"What form of harness is used? What are their capabilities regarding loads? How are they broken in; and at what age? Would it be possible to secure a team and have it shipped to me in Toronto? What is a good sleigh dog worth?

"Now I am desirous of taking a trip to Alaska and I would be pleased if you could tell me what lines of employment would be open to me. I have lived in a city all my life. Driving horses is my occupation and I want to get some outdoor work in the Yukon or Alaskan country. I am twenty years old."—JAMES J. DOYLE, Toronto, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I am glad you are interested in dog traction. It is really quite a fascinating subject.

The terms "Eskimo dogs," "huskies" and "malamutes" are used interchangeably by a good many people. The Eskimo dog is the native dog of the Arctic and Behring Sea coasts, and may be either a "malamute" or a "husky." The malamute is the wolf-fox-coyote—"outside" dog—a combination of some or all of these (though some people deny the fox ingredient) which both the Northern Indians in Alaska and Canada and the Eskimos possess.

The name is that of the Malamute (variously spelled) Indians. He is a black, black and white, brindle, or gray or gray and white dog with more or less small, pointed, stiff ears and pointed muzzle. He has more or less hair on his toes and in all parts usually lacking that protection in the ordinary dog of southern climes. The hair is downy or furry close to the skin. He is a critter of considerable variety of appearance in other respects than as to these common features.

The husky, on the other hand, is a more or less pure descendant of the timber-wolf and a good specimen of hide can not readily be distinguished from that of a wolf. He is larger than the ordinary Indian or Eskimo dog, in proportion as the latter differs from him in the amount of wolf strain. He is gray, with almost-black long hairs, which are more abundant and longer on the ridge of the back, giving him a much darker color when looked down upon than in a side view. The belly is much lighter, sometimes almost white. He is mottled, or rather shaded to some extent, and the whole appearance of the pelt is that of a fur. The under side of the neck, like the belly, is light gray or whitish. The best specimens came from the mouth of the Mackenzie River.

The natives use the "Siwash" harness. There is a band 'round the neck, passing between the forelegs, one band rising thence on each side, across the ribs diagonally and coming together at the saddle of the back where the two are joined by another connecting with the back of the neckband. The three bands are brought together, as stated, at the back and a single trace runs back to the sled or joins another similar trace from the dog's mate at a distance of several feet and the two, united in one, go back to the sled. It is a poor arrangement.

The white man's dog harness consists of a collar made in much the same way as a horse collar, and the two traces are similarly attached. At the sides they are held in place by a back strap with a broader part above and snapping under the belly. There is no breeching, of course. The two traces often are united a few feet back of the dog.

This is, in fact, the usual plan with light running equipment, but the more careful dogmen and those who freight loads use a singletree at the back of the traces. This is united to the central draw-rope by a two or two-and-a-half-foot line. Sometimes these use a kind of doubletree which crosses the draw-rope and is fastened to it. In short we drive dogs much as a team or several teams of horses are driven, and by the use of a good many German snaps (Arctic drivers probably call them by some other name, now) the harnessing and unharnessing is quickly done, or the position of the pairs of dogs quickly altered. Two and two is the usual way, with one leader ahead.

The collars (neck collars) of the dogs are attached to the doubletree or lead rope a foot or so ahead by a light line of suitable length so as to prevent the dogs from running sideways and getting too far away from the line. The Siwash harness is not efficient, and added to the clumsy native sleds makes the pulling power of the dog in actual load hauled much less than with the white men's teams.

Their capabilities regarding loads can only be expressed, of course, in terms of comparison with that of other draft animals, and as you are probably not familiar with reindeer we will speak of horses. Either a dog or a horse can, of course, keep almost any amount of load moving on glare ice, once the load is started. But on a level, hard, snow trail at moderate temperatures, say zero or a bit warmer and especially if there is a little sun on the trail a team of dogs each averaging seventy-five pounds in weight will keep a load moving all day that weighs three times the weight of the dogs. This feat makes him, I should say, the most wonderful draft animal we know anything about.

The best I ever got out of horses—and I handled a hundred picked animals one Winter under various conditions—was about nine tons per six-horse team, on a similar snow trail. The horses averaged a shade under one thousand five hundred pounds apiece, so they drew about twice their own weight, but they couldn't keep it up the way the dogs do.

Under less favorable trail conditions and in colder weather the dogs will average twice their own weight, and under almost any conditions on a broken trail, and day in and day out, twelve and fourteen hours a day, up hill and down dale, they will lug their own weight. On the Arctic we feed them a half a dried salmon every night and on hard work a bit also at noon. A pound to two and one-half pounds a day, depending on the dryness of the food, the size of the dog, the coldness of the weather, etc.—that is about the ration. A horse "packs" better than a dog, however.

The natives break in the pups by letting them run along at first, and then tying them to the sled, at first behind, then alongside of their mother or father in the team. They soon begin to pull from imitation and from a natural pup-desire to go faster and see what the next turn of the trail will develop in the way of interesting or eatable sights.

The team is guided entirely by the leader who listens for "gee" and "haw," "mush" (get-up) and "whoa." I had a leader that I trained to "gee-a-little." It had come to be a nuisance to "gee," and have him turn too much to the right and then "haw" him back part way (a stupid dog will haw clear back and then some, but a sensible one will get the idea). So when I wanted him to veer off a few points, as a sailor would say, I added the "a little." If I wanted a right angle turn I said, "gee," and if I wanted to turn clear round I said, "gee-round."

I have no doubt you could get a dog-team from upper Canada. It would be too uncertain and expensive to get a team from the Yukon or Alaska. A *good* sleigh dog is usually worth fifty to one hundred dollars, but very fair ones can be bought for much less. It depends on when, where and how the purchase is made. In the Spring dogs are naturally cheaper than at the beginning of Winter.

Of course you can get work in Alaska, just as anywhere else. And good "skinners" are usually in demand. If you like the outdoors and are strong and energetic and used to working with your hands you will have no trouble in Dawson, Y. T., or anywhere in the Alaskan camps. Winter freighting with horses has superseded that with dogs in all the well-established camps, but dogs continue to be the only means in the smaller and newer districts—or at least the principal means, for there is usually a stray horse or two wherever a group of men are to be found.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

ADVENTURE HAS FOUND ONE MAN OUT OF EVERY FIVE ASKED FOR

ADAMS, two aunts and uncle who lived in Tallapoosa or Coosa County. My father, W. T. Adams, who ran away from home when 14 years old and was thought to have drowned is still living. Address either my father, W. T. ADAMS, 1205 Harrington Ave., North Fort Worth, Texas, or me, PVT. JOHN Q. ADAMS, 1st Co., 10th Regt. Marines, Quantico, Va.

McALVEY, MAGGIE, WILLIAM and JOHN. Last heard from them about the close of the Civil War near Wilkes-Barre, Pa. I will pay a small reward for news of them or any of their descendants.—Address MRS. BARBARA McALVEY WORKMAN, Route 1, Box 49, Lavalette, W. Va.

MONTGOMERY, SAMUEL. Brother. Born in Belfast, Ireland. Last heard of in Cleveland, Ohio, December, 1916, sailing on the Great Lakes. He is about 32 years old; height 5 ft. 6 in.; weight 150 lbs.; complexion fair.—Address PVT. JAMES MONTGOMERY, Co. A., 21st M. G. Bn., Camp Baker, El Paso, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

HARRIS, GEO. Brother of "Panlifter" Ed. Harris. Last heard from at London, Ont., October, 1913. Age about 40; 5 ft. 7 in., 135 lbs.; fair, brown hair, blue eyes; first joint missing from little finger of one hand.—Address TOM HARRIS, Dover, Wyoming.

HALEY, ROBT. E. LEE. A native of California, age about 34 years. Any information would be gratefully accepted pertaining to his whereabouts, whether dead or alive.—Address F. J. PIERSON, 1443 Arabella St., New Orleans, La.

KEY, THOS. W. Last heard of in Refugio, Texas, in Summer of 1914. Write to BERNARD P. McCLUNG, Hdq. Co., 63rd Artillery, C.A.C., Ft. Worden, Wash.

WOODFORD, WILLIAM, conductor; HOUSEHOLDER, BUD, freight engineer; GERBRICK, COMMILLUS, section boss.—Address JOHN H. GERBRICK, Hospital, National Soldiers' Home, Indiana.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

TIPTON, CLYDE. Son. Last heard of six years ago in Nebraska. Said he was going to Montana. Has brown hair, blue-gray eyes and is 5 ft. 9 in. tall.—Address MRS. FLORA E. TIPTON, Box 366, Harris Co., Humble, Texas.

"TEXAS." Please write to your old fire-fighting pal.—Address H. LLOYD STEWART, Ovando, Montana.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First August or Mid-August issues of *Adventure*. They can get name and address of inquirer from this magazine.

ALBRITTON, TOM and JESSIE; Bates, A. L.; Baumier, Austin; Berry, Nellie; Brownhill, Timothy and William; Bruffey, Elmer; Carmichael, Archibald; Donald, William James and John Henry; Foster, Dixon or Bert Foster; Fuller, Walter William; Glanman, All.; Gross, Louis; Hayne, Emil; Lough, Lyle (Slim); McNellis (William White); Morgon, George Francis; Nelson, Benjamin Earl; O'Brien, James D. O'Connor, Frank; Rasner, John; Robinson, James and Edward; Ruble, Ralph E.; Sherman, Colonel Elsworth; Thornton, "Vic"; Wharton, Mike; Mrs. West; Zachon, John.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Ten other stirring stories, besides the two mentioned on page 2, will come to you in the First October issue, in your hands on September 3d.

THE WAYS OF MOUNTAIN MEN *By Hugh Pendexter*
A story of the daring pioneers and traders who won the great West from the Indians.

THE CALL OF THE JUNGLE *By Clyde B. Hough*
Stirring days in the Philippines when American soldiers learned the jungle secrets.

THE LITTLE TRAPPER OF NOBODY'S COUNTRY *By Hapsburg Liebe*
About a little lad trapping animals in the Tennessee hills—and the great resolve of his life.

PAY-DAY *By Roy P. Churchill*
A story of the U. S. Navy—and the most popular day aboard ship.

THE BEAR VALLEY HUCKSTER *By William H. Hamby*
This huckster's life is a bit more exciting than the average.

THE CAVE *By Charles Beadle*
In Africa you find it—two white men in it, surrounded by howling natives.

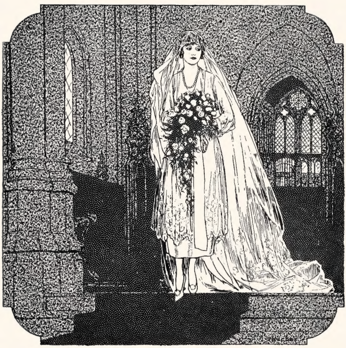
BLOOD MONEY *By William Dudley Pelley*
Some might take it. But with these sons of the West it is different.

ON THE FAR EDGE *By S. B. H. Hurst*
The story of a lonely cabin in barren Alaska and why it was there.

THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN. Part II *By Jackson Gregory*
Sleepy San Juan wakes with pistols banging and bullets flying when *Galloway* and *Rod Norton* try to settle their score.

THE WHITE MAN OF BORNEO *By Gordon McCreagh*
An American in Borneo—and what he found in the jungle.

FIRST OCTOBER ADVENTURE



Here Comes the Bride

OUT into the world goes the bride to establish a home of her own. Thus begins her real business in life—the most important and varied business in the world, conducting a home and rearing children.

A few years ago the groom left college and started to learn *his* business. He worked hard, he watched those about him, he read the technical papers of his trade and now he has been successful enough to marry.

Who is going to teach the wife *her* complex business of conducting the home? Hitherto she has been sheltered and had things done for her. To be sure, she can cook a little, sew a little and has an idea she wants her bedroom done in pink. But the problems she now faces are multiple and new, and on her success depends the happiness of the home and the well-being of several lives. A dozen times a day questions arise to which her past experience gives no answer.

And so it is very natural and very necessary that the new wife do as her mother did before her—lean heavily on the practical household service offered her in THE DELINEATOR.

Here she finds economical recipes for meals; attractive ways to arrange the interior of her home; designs for clothes and instructions how to make them; and later how to take care of herself before her baby arrives, and how to conserve the health of the little lad when he comes.

It is such service as this that has established THE DELINEATOR for fifty years in the most progressive homes of the nation—THE DELINEATOR, always practical, always up to date in its expert household service.

It is thus that 85 per cent. of the million DELINEATOR subscribers are married women who get from its pages every month not only wholesome entertainment, but vitally needed household advice

It is thus that the columns of THE DELINEATOR prove the ideal place for the advertisements of manufacturers who make articles used in American homes. The women are the "purchasing agents" of the American home.

One million "purchasing agents" rely on THE DELINEATOR for advice and use its advertising columns as the guide in their household buying.

The Delineator

The Magazine in a Million Homes

Arthur T. White of Massachusetts in his spare time built a business that pays him $3,000 a year.

Are You Satisfied?

Are you contented to make ends just meet?

Mrs. J. T. Wilkins of Georgia—in time that would otherwise be wasted earns $50 a month.

Or would you like $50 extra a month—or a permanent business paying $3,000 a year? You can have either!

The increasing demand for ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE and THE DELINEATOR makes it necessary for us to add to our staff of local representatives. We need more men and women like Mr. White, Mr. Van Gieson, Mrs. Wilkins and Mrs. McCall, to forward to us the new and renewal subscriptions for these well-known publications.

This is Your Opportunity
to make the extra money you need

If you have only one hour a week or if you have ten hours a day, we need you. There's a place for these magazines in every home—this year, next year, every year. The door to a permanent income is open to you.

No experience is necessary, nor do you have to invest a cent of money. We furnish everything and help you to build up a successful business.

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Mrs. Nellie McCall of Minnesota, whose earnings total as high as $50 a week.

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Gentlemen:
Please tell me about your plan of making extra money.

Name.........................

Street ....

Town............. *State*........

Augustus Van Gieson of New Jersey lost his regular job because of his age. To-day he is making $1,500 a year.